

Think
on
These
Things

By
Vance Hutton

J. C. Choate Publications

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Publisher's Statement

Brother Vance Hutton has preached for 23 years, 17 of which have been with the church at Double Springs, Alabama.

A number of years ago the Double Springs Church of Christ made the commitment to sponsor Wayne and Janet Barrier in their participation in World Evangelism efforts in India and Asia. It was at that time that I became more involved with these good brethren and also met Vance. As a result of this relationship, Vance began to send his weekly bulletin, and I asked permission to put together a series of his articles in book form. He readily agreed to my request, and this book is the result.

I want to commend **Think on These Things** to you, and I want to encourage you to read it and share it with your friends. Also, the articles can be used in church bulletins, and preachers may want to develop them as sermon outlines.

With that, we invite you to **Think on These Things**.

J. C. Choate
Winona, MS.
Dec. 6, 2001

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Pilgrims on Earth

The Bible speaks of several who confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth: *“These all died in faith, and having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth”* (Hebrews 11:13). Peter besought his readers on the basis of being pilgrims and strangers together: *“Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul”* (1 Peter 2:11). Our citizenship is to be in heaven: *“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”* (Philippians 3:20). Here below, we are dwelling in something temporary as a tent: *“For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens”* (2 Corinthians 5:1). We are not home yet: *“We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord”* (2 Corinthians 5:8). There are some needed Biblical principles in our lives to help us as we travel this pilgrimage from earth to the world beyond. Notice the following:

1. Pilgrims look up to God. Pilgrims are not so much earthbound. It is not within man to provide his own direction: *“O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself”* (Jeremiah 10:23). The pilgrim looks up to God for guidance. God’s word becomes his light and lamp: *“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”* *“Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8:31,32). He looks up to God for strength and for provisions: *“I*

can do all things through Christ who strengthens me...And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:13,19). The example of Christ becomes His model for living: "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps" (1 Peter 2:21). Lives are lived walking by faith and not by sight: "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). Prayers, worship, and Bible study become even more vital than living.

2. Pilgrims look within for inventory: Pilgrims realize that they have a God to please. Enoch sought to please God with his life: "By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, and was not found, because God had taken him; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God" (Hebrews 11:5), and so must we. Examine yourselves: "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? — unless indeed you are disqualified" (2 Corinthians 13:5). "Search me, O God, and try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23,24). A Christian as a pilgrim knows he must live pure in heart to see God and be holy in order to see the Lord: "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

3. Pilgrims look back to be wiser: Time and experience become great teachers. Laban said he had learned from experience: "And Laban said to him, Please stay, if I have found favor in your eyes, for I have learned by experience that the Lord has blessed me for your sake" (Genesis 30:27). Days should speak and multitude of years should teach wisdom: "I said, age should

speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom" (Job 32:7). Paul wrote of learning things: "*Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content*" (Philippians 4:11). He also spoke of the things that happened to him being turned into good: "*But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel*" (Philippians 1:12). Let us all benefit from the past and not duplicate the mistakes of yesterday.

4. Pilgrims look around for opportunities: The pilgrim senses a different mission than most. He knows this world is not his home. He lives to serve the church — he wants to see God: "*Then Jesus said to him, Away with you, Satan! For it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve*" (Matthew 4:10), the church: "*I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea*" (Romans 16:1), and others: "*For you, brethren, have been called to liberty, only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another*" (Galatians 5:13). He is anxious to do what he can. Let us as pilgrims look for people to help, people to win, people to restore, and people to encourage. As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially those of the household of faith.

5. Pilgrims look forward in hope: Hope of the promised land serves as an anchor to the soul: "*This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil*" (Hebrews 6:19). The promises of God are embraced: "*These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth*" (Hebrews 11:13). He endures because of the

quality of the reward to be received. Hope serves as one of the elements of salvation. This keep us pressing on. We are not yet home, but expect to be at the end of the way.

Yes, we are pilgrims looking up to God, within to inventory, back for wisdom, around for opportunities, and forward in hope.

Those Who Have Fallen

The Lord said that few will eternally be saved: "*Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it*" (Matthew 7:13,14). There are many readily seen causes that reduce the number of the redeemed. One such reason is that a large percentage of the few that obey the gospel fell away from the Lord into unfaithfulness. 1 Corinthians 10:12 says to let him that stands take heed lest he fall. Jesus spoke of those that fall away: "*But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away*" (Luke 8:13). The Hebrews writer wrote of the danger of falling like the children of Israel had done: "*Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience*" (Hebrews 4:11). Peter warned about falling from one's own steadfastness: "*You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked*" (2 Peter 3:17). Each Christian must guard against falling. People who fall away are worse off than before they obeyed the gospel: "*For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning*" (2 Peter 2:20). Will you be faithful unto the end? The Lord spoke of enduring unto the end; only then is salvation promised. Notice with me how the fall is often in one of the following three ways: falling from, falling in, or falling for.

1. Falling From: Think of the number of once faithful Christians who fell from their own steadfastness as Peter says in 2 Peter 3:17. They fall from grace and the favor and good standing with God: “*You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace*” (Galatians 5:4). They endure for some time but things like tribulation, persecution, and temptation arise and they fall from the steadfastness that once they held. It might even be from growing weary or tired in well doing. They faint in their hearts and minds: “*For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls*” (Hebrews 12:3). They thus turn away from Christ, the church and their brethren. James would say that they err from the truth. They fall from the good way and from the hope of eternal life.

2. Falling In: Many folks in falling away from the Lord do so by falling in love with the world once more. Demas forsook the way of truth because the world became more attractive to him: “*For Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world*” (2 Timothy 4:10). Jesus spoke of those who were choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life. The evil of this world can be very enticing. The Lord said not to love it: “*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him*” (1 John 2:15). We can be influenced by the here and now. Some folks fall in love with the present and fail to seek the things above, fail to put the kingdom first, and fail again to labor for things eternal: “*Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him*” (John 6:27).

3. Falling For: Think of the number of once faithful Christians who have fallen victim to the false doctrines of our day. Our Lord said to beware of false prophets: "*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves*" (Matthew 7:15), and to test or try the spirits: "*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world*" (1 John 4:1). Paul warned about turning to "*another gospel*": "*I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ*" (Galatians 1:6,7). We must remember what John said about not abiding in the doctrine of Christ. Truth saves, and error will condemn the souls of men. Think of how many false doctrines there are that relate to the plan of salvation, worship to our God, the organization of the church, and daily Christian living. These have the potential to make the difference between heaven and hell for eternity.

Friend, you can fall. Many have fallen from their own steadfastness due to struggles, many have fallen in love with the world, and many have fallen for false doctrines. Do not fall, my brethren!

The Will of God

The will of God is a most interesting study. God's ideal will for man is that all be saved. Sin on man's part severs that part of God's will because all sin and most make no effort to rid themselves of sin. God cannot fellowship sin. God's conditional will lays down conditions for man to meet to pardon sin through Christ and thus once more to have hope for heaven: "*Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city*" (Revelation 22:14). In fact, only those who do God's will can enter heaven. A promise is offered for those who do this will: "*For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise*" (Hebrews 10:36). He who does God's will shall abide forever. We ought to obey God. To fail to obey that will, one has only doom to anticipate: "*And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people*" (Acts 3:23). How sad that many are not obedient to God's will. God's ultimate will is that the obedient be saved and the disobedient be lost.

A dear lady was buried last week who had lived her many years for the Lord. She once told me that if she could live to be one thousand years old, she would want to live them all for the Lord. May that wonderful spirit live within us all. She reminds me of the three following points about the will of God:

1. God's will and not mine: Our perfect example is Christ who lived His life with the Father's will first and foremost in mind. His meat and drink were to do God's will. He came down from heaven to do God's will and sought not His own: "*I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is right-*

eous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me" (John 5:30). He always did the will of the Father. We must stand at attention to the Father's will as did Cornelius: "*So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God*" (Acts 10:33). Let us be obedient and do all that God has commanded. May we crucify our will and way to the choices of our Lord. We must be most interested in pleasing God: "*Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him*" (2 Corinthians 5:9). His will is to be carried out on earth as in heaven, as Jesus said in Matthew 6. May we present ourselves a living sacrifice to the Lord's will and way.

2. God's will and not the will of others: We are not to follow even a multitude if they are doing wrong. People may think us to be strange, but so be it. God's will must be more important to us than the will of others: "*In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you*" (1 Peter 4:4). We must say no to the will of others over God, even if it would bring pleasure, or if it would bring popularity. We must not even give in to being forced to obey the will of others even if great threats are attached. Peter and John certainly would not do such: "*But Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men*" (Acts 5:29).

3. God's will forever: Peter said that the rest of our time in the flesh is to be to the will of God and not to the lusts of the flesh: "*That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God*" (1 Peter 4:2). No wonder the Bible says we have need of patience. Jesus prom-

ised that those who endure to the end will be saved. Job spoke of a life that he planned to live until he died. May we all give ourselves to the Lord's will and not our own, and not give in or even be forced to do the will of others contrary to God's will, but give ourselves to the will of God all our days. Let us read it, understand it, and keep it.

Beware of Idolatry

The last verse of the epistle of 1 John is a warning and a command. Christians were admonished to keep themselves from idols: *“Little children, keep yourselves from idols”* (1 John 5:21). Paul told the Corinthians to flee from idolatry: *“Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry”* (1 Corinthians 10:14). Those at Thessalonia were commended for turning from idolatry to serve the living and true God. No doubt Paul’s heart was broken when he saw the city of Athens full of idols: *“Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols”* (Acts 17:16). Part of the message for Gentile converts was that they were to abstain from pollutions of Idols. Idolatry is referred to as an abominable thing in 1 Peter 4:3. It is listed as a work of the flesh in Galatians 5:20 and if persisted in and not repented of will render one unfit for heaven. No wonder Revelations 22:15 places the idolater outside the city of heaven and even the place of a lake of fire which is prepared and reserved for the idolater: *“But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death”* (Revelation 21:8). Another warning is given in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 about idolaters not being permitted entrance into the kingdom of God. Idolatry becomes that which supplants the place that the Lord deserves and demands. This is far more reaching than some would like to think. Yes, idolatry encompasses the image that does not see, hear, or feel but there is more. Think of the many things that are put ahead of the Lord. Much of this is wrapped up in the three following words: persons, properties, and pleasures.

1. Persons and idolatry: It is quite easy for other people to become more important to us and more influential over us than the Lord. Our allegiance is to be to the Lord. We are to obey God and not men. Think how many allow their friends, the majority, entertainers, sports heroes, or even their family to cause them to disobey God and not put Him first. Then, how many allow self to be on the throne. My will becomes more important than the Lord and His will. 2 Timothy 3:2 speaks of folks loving their own selves in opposition to God. How many feel sufficient in and of themselves and how many trust their own self-righteousness? *“Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others”* (Luke 18:9).

2. Properties and idolatry: The rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-24 is an example of choosing things over the Lord. The rich farmer in Luke 12:15-21 lived solely for things. Throughout history, prosperity has typically created a social climate antagonistic to spirituality. Let us never trust in uncertain riches: *“Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy”* (1 Timothy 6:17). Deuteronomy 6:10-18 was a warning lest they forget God when prosperity came. How we need to learn that covetousness is idolatry: *“Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry”* (Colossians 3:5)! Let us not be choked by riches.

3. Pleasure and idolatry: Many love pleasure more than God *“...traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God”* (2 Timothy 3:4). To seek pleasures as the

essence of life will bring doom. Let us learn that such lasts only for a season. There are many pleasures that are not wrong in and of themselves until they are placed ahead of the Lord and His work and will. Many forms of recreation are good in their place. Let us not be choked by the pleasure principle.

Let us love God supremely: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind”* (Matthew 22:37) and seek His kingdom first: *“And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God”* (2 Corinthians 8:50).

Things that Destroy Humility

God calls for His people to be humble. Our perfect example, Jesus Christ, was humble. Paul in Philippians 2:5-8 wrote of the Lord humbling Himself, even to the death of the cross. Jesus spoke of Himself in Matthew 11:29 and affirmed that He was meek and lowly in heart: *“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”* We are to follow our Lord in this trait. Micah spoke of the required humility: *“He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God”* (Micah 6:8). Many verses in the New Testament call for us to be of an humble heart and disposition. Philippians 2:3 speaks of the lowliness of mind that should characterize us all: *“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.”* James 4:10 speaks of humbling ourselves in the sight of the Lord with the faithful promise that the Lord will lift us up: *“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.”* 1 Peter 5:5 teaches us that God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble and calls upon us to clothe ourselves with humility. The humble will be exalted in due time. Humility is a part of the new man that is to be put on after one becomes a Christian: *“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering”* (Colossians 3:12). Ephesians 4:2 calls upon children of God to walk with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love. Are we gentle, courteous, meek, and lowly in heart and mind? Let us notice three things which either prevent or destroy humility in

our lives. With a realization of the importance of humility, these things ought to be avoided as if they were carriers of a deadly plague. These are feelings of self-righteousness, self-sufficiency, and self-satisfaction.

1. Feelings of self-righteousness: Jesus spoke a parable unto certain individuals who trusted in themselves that they were righteous. Feelings of self-righteousness prevented or destroyed any humility that this Pharisee might have had. How sad it is to have an arrogant attitude toward sin. A man who views himself as righteous in and of himself and without the Lord is greatly to be pitied. Let us never forget that we are righteous only through the Lord: *“But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God — and righteousness and sanctification and redemption —that, as it is written, He who glories, let him glory in the Lord”* (1 Corinthians 1:30,31).

2. Feelings of self-sufficiency: A person cannot be humble who fails to see that God is the giver and the one who has blessed him with all he has or will have. God gives to all life, breath, and all things. In Him we live, move, and have our being. The rich farmer of Luke 12 is one who feels self-sufficient. He senses no need of God and feels no debt to Him. It is not possible for one of such feelings to be humble.

3. Feelings of self-satisfaction: Paul is an example of one ever so humble. He viewed himself as chief of sinners, less than the least of all saints, and the least of the apostles. He was truly a man of humility. Paul was not self-satisfied. Philippians 3:12-14 shows that Paul forgot past accomplishments and ever pressed forward toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us ever realize that we can know more, be more, and do more for the Lord.

These things prevent or destroy humility. We must be humble to enter and be great in the kingdom of heaven: “*Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 18:3).

The Frailty of People

James asked about the purpose and design of life in James 4:14: “*...whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away*” (James 4:14). Do we comprehend what is the essence of life? Solomon searched for the meaning of life on earth in the Book of Ecclesiastes. His search and travels led him through the quest for wisdom, riches, pleasure, and power. His conclusion is found at the book’s end, “*Let us fear God and keep His commandments for this is the whole of man. For God will bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good or evil*” (Ecclesiastes 12:13,14). So many things happened recently that have to remind us of the noble purpose of life. Forty-one lives were claimed by a tornado. Over eleven hundred houses were damaged with almost six hundred being totally destroyed. Businesses, church buildings, barns, forests, fences, livestock, automobiles, and so many other things were destroyed. One of the most popular of all country music singers, Tammy Wynette, at age fifty-five died suddenly. Also, former gold metal winner and heavyweight boxing champ, John Tate, was killed in a car accident in Tennessee. An eighteen year old was killed here in our area in a four wheeler accident. We have seen the devastation. We have helped with relief that maybe survivors can start anew. A few things come to mind and focus. I think of the frailty of people, the futility of possessions, the folly of pleasures, and the future of our pilgrimage. Notice these ever so briefly with me:

- 1. Frailty of people:** The thread that links soul and body is ever so brittle. We do not know what will be tomorrow. Truly

there is but a step between us and the great divide. Wisdom demands that we be ready for death.

2. Futility of possessions: Truly, riches can take wings and fly away: “*Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away like an eagle toward heaven*” (Proverbs 23:5). They are ever so uncertain. We brought nothing into this world and it is certain that we shall carry nothing out. Again let us be wise and labor for the things that endure unto everlasting life: “*Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him*” (John 6:27).

3. Folly of pleasures: Considering the things that have happened, just think how foolish to live for pleasures. A life lived as such is one of self-condemnation. They last only a season and then what? We all know that then comes the day of reckoning: “*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad*” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

4. Future of our pilgrimage: There is a place beyond this life. Man goes to his long home. I could take that journey before this day is done. This life is our proving ground. Do not wait until too late to learn that intellectual learning, pleasures, power, and riches are not what life is all about. Let us learn from experience.

Spiritual Blessings in Christ

There are many spiritual blessings in Christ. In fact, there are not any spiritual blessings outside of Christ: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ”* (Ephesians 1:3). Are you in Christ that these blessings can be yours? Two New Testament passages tell us how to get into Christ. Both speak of being baptized into Christ: *“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?”* (Romans 6:3); *“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ”* (Galatians 3:27). A man in Christ is one who hears the gospel message, believes it, repents of his sinfulness, confesses his faith in Christ, and is baptized into Christ to rid him of his sins and to then become a part of the body or church of the Lord. As a Christian, are you abiding in Christ that you might continue to claim these great blessings found only in Christ that are recorded in John 8? These are light, liberty, and life.

1. Light offered through Christ: John 8:12 reads, *“Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world; he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”* God and Christ are light just as they are love. There is no darkness at all in Deity. Such is His very nature and the essence of His being. He is the essence of holiness, truth, and glory. He is the very opposite of all that darkness represents. The Lord then offers us the blessing of walking in light. Light is so valuable to us in a physical sense but think of the blessing of the spiritual direction in Christ. We have been brought out of darkness and into light and have light for our path: *“But if we walk*

in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Let us all walk as children of light and as of the day. May we be the light of the world: “*You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden*” (Matthew 5:14). Only as we walk and abide in Christ can we enjoy this light and be a light for others.

2. Liberty offered through Christ: John 8:31,32 reads, “*Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed; and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.*” There is freedom indeed in Christ. There is true liberty in Christ. Think of the blessing of being freed from that which enslaved us and held us guilty and would eventually doom us to be lost forever. The Lord is just, and justice demands that the penalty for sin be paid. The Lord offers liberty from every evil thought, word, or deed you have ever committed and for the things left unthought, unsaid, and undone that should have been. This is the greatest liberty.

3. Life offered through Christ: John 8:51 reads, “*Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death.*” Jesus came that we might have life: “*The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly*” (John 10:10). The Lord gives eternal life to His sheep if they will keep listening and obeying Him as their Shepherd. This is the record that God has given to us, eternal life through His Son: “*And this is the testimony; that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son*” (1 John 5:12). This life is eternal, made possible by Christ.

Light, liberty, and life are just part of the blessings in Christ. If these were all there were, they would be plenty to motivate us to live for Him who died for us.

Different Crosses

Matthew 27 presents the dreadful scene of three crucifixions. Two were crucified for being thieves in their past. One, our Lord, had done no sin. He was a man of no faults at all. It was awful that Jesus had to suffer as He did for us (Galatians 2:20), but we must truly ever be thankful for that scene. In trying to get to heaven, I find common ground with all three of these crucifixions. One reveals rebellion; one reveals repentance; one reveals redemption. Every person seeking heaven must come to terms with rebellion, repentance, and redemption. Let us notice these three crosses.

1. The Cross of Rebellion: We all offend in many things: *“For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body”* (James 3:2). We often transgress the boundary of that which is lawful before God: *“Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness”* (1 John 3:4). There is not a righteous man on the face of the earth who does only good and does not sin. All have sinned. There is none righteous, no not one, and all have fallen short (Romans 3:10,23). If we say we have no sin, then we are deceived (1 John 1:8), and if we say we have not sinned, we make the Lord a liar, and His word is not in us. There are evil thoughts, unjustifiable words, wicked deeds and good thoughts left unthought and good words left unspoken and good deeds left undone. I find common ground with the men who had sinned. We too must come to grips with rebellion against God.

2. The Cross of Repentance: One of the thieves railed on our Lord in the closing moments of his life. The other thief

accepted their punishment as reaping that which they had sown and then from all we can gather from the holy word, he repented and asked the Lord for the favor of being remembered when the Lord came into His kingdom: *"Then he said to Jesus, Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom"* (Luke 23:42). The next verse recalls the words of Jesus, *"Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."* I hope we find common ground with this man. He that confesses his sins and forsakes them shall be blessed by the Lord. Repent and be baptized: *"Then Peter said to them, Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 2:38). Repent and be converted. Repent and pray. God commands all men everywhere to repent. Man must turn away from sin or perish. If we confess our faults. *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9).

3. The Cross of Redemption: Again, we all are on common ground; we have need of redemption. We have redemption in Christ through His blood: *"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace"* (Ephesians 1:7). Man is offered redemption through that precious blood. Outside of Christ we are without God and without hope, but Christ brings us near by His blood. He is the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:1,2). He tasted death for all. God gave Him that we might live. He gave Himself that He might redeem us (buy us from all sin and purify us as a people of His own possession) *"...who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works"* (Titus 2:14). This gift is held up and offered to all who will receive it. How

sad that men will not come that they might have life.

Where are you, dear friend, in relationship to these three crosses? Are you living in rebellion, or are you a person of repentance? Do you know redemption?

In Spite of Everything

“Nevertheless” is an interesting word. The meaning is “in spite thereof” or “however”. The word finds its way in inspiration in some quite meaningful ways for our lives. Sometimes the meanings are things to imitate and sometimes things to shun. Let us notice three settings in our New Testament where the idea is portrayed.

1. In spite of our will, we must choose God’s will: Look to our supreme example. *“For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps”* (1 Peter 2:21). Luke 22:42 reads, *“Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.”* His meat and drink was to do the Father’s will. He always did those things that pleased His Father. The Lord teaches us that to go to heaven we must do the Father’s will. A promise of life awaits us if we will do His will. He that does the will of the Father abides forever. Our wills are sometimes in contrast to the will of the Lord. Ephesians 2:3 mentions our lusts and desires. These are at odds with the Lord’s will for our lives. There is the call of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life: *“For all that is in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — is not of the Father but is of the world”* (1 John 2:16). The devil seeks to get us to go against the Lord’s way. In spite of our will and the devil’s temptations, let us choose God and His way. Peter had fished all night and had taken nothing and the Lord told him to go back and take a great catch. Peter questioned the wisdom of that but then said **nevertheless** he would. He did and was blessed. Let us all give the rest of our time in the flesh to the will

of God. We may not always see the wisdom of it, but may we walk by faith and not by sight. There is great depth in the wisdom and knowledge of God. His ways are above ours as the heavens above the earth.

2. In spite of many good traits, something vital can be lacking: The Lord mentioned several good things about the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:2,3, yet in verse 4, He said **nevertheless** He had somewhat against them because they had left their first love. Some rulers in John 12:42,43 had some good traits, **nevertheless** they would not confess our Lord lest they be put out of the synagogues. The rich young ruler who came to the Lord in Matthew 19 had many good traits, but lacked one vital trait. Are we lacking in one or more things that might cost us our souls? Some are like Cornelius, a good man but never having yet obeyed the gospel.

3. In spite of hardships and persecution, we can be faithful: Paul was not ashamed in spite of persecutions. Christ lived within him. *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me”* (Galatians 2:20). Read 1 Corinthians 4:11 and see all he went through but still he was faithful. In spite of even the chastening hand of God, let us be faithful that we might yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness. Let us hold on so that we might partake of Christ and have a part of the eternal reward of the soul.

Do not allow anything to come between you and the will of God, His traits, and His faithfulness.

What the Christian Life Offers

The Christian life is the best of this world. Peter wrote of it as a life of good days and a life that can truly be loved: "*He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good*" (1 Peter 3:10,11). Jesus spoke of living for Him as being a life of "an hundredfold". One of the great blessings of the Christian life is the way the Christian is permitted to face death. All Christians have to face death and it is not pleasant, but Christians will not die spiritually or taste the second death: "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die*" (John 11:25,26). Each person must know that they could taste physical death anytime; they must face it sometime, so they should be ready at all times. Hebrews 11:21 refers to Jacob when he was dying. Death was close at hand when Paul wrote 2 Timothy 4:6-8. We can almost experience the deaths of Steven as recorded in Acts 7, James in Acts 12, Antipas in Revelation 2, and others. Notice with me four things that stand out in facing death by a Christian.

1. The peace he enjoys: There is a peace different from anything the world knows given by our Lord: "*Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid*" (John 14:27). This peace even passes our ability to fully understand and appreciate it. Almost every epistle begins with the assurance of peace from our Lord. A Christian has peace because of a plan from God for his life that has been carried out. His spirit within has met the requirements of the Spirit's message from

above. He is a child of God and has the privilege of prayer. He leaves something behind, but he has something better to anticipate on the other side.

2. The promises he can cherish: There are precious promises of God to His faithful children. God is not slack concerning His promises, nor will He forget. He has power to perform that which He promises. As we face death, think of His promise of destroying him who has the power of death: *"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil"* (Hebrews 2:14,15), and His promise of victory over the grave: *"But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Corinthians 15:57), and His promise of resurrection: *"Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth — those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation"* (John 5:28,29), and His return: *"But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus"* (1 Thessalonians 4:13,14). It will be well for the righteous. Fear is removed.

3. The pattern he can leave: A Christian leaves an example for others to imitate. His good works follow him. A pattern of good will continue to produce good fruits even after the person has died. The memory of such an one will continue to spur this generation onward in the right direction. Live so that in death you will point others toward the land that is fairer than day.

4. The place he will enter: There is a rest to such a one. This place is a land of no tears, crying, sorrow, pain, sin, or death. It is a home with all the redeemed of all the ages. A land awaits that is eternal, built by God, and has many mansions. Neither decay, moths, nor thieves will ever tarnish that place. Do you have hope of such an eternal abode?

Each person can face death with peace, promises, leaving a good pattern, and the expectation of entering the place called heaven.

God Has a Plan for Each One

No two persons live their individual lives exactly by the same schedule or format. Each person has his or her own uniqueness or even peculiarities. This is natural and maybe this is one reason for the Lord requiring longsuffering and forbearance of each of us: *"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love"* (Ephesians 4:1,2). God has left many choices to our own personal judgment. This in no way says that God does not have a plan for our lives. God does require our lives to be lived with the noble purpose of bringing glory to Him. The whole world needs to recognize that God has a plan for our lives. Paul refers to life in Acts 17 as originating with God, obligated to God, and one day destined to be either with or without God based upon the way life has been lived here on earth. Please notice the following three points with me about life.

1. Learning from yesterday: Laban spoke of learning from experience. Job 32:7 says that days should speak and multitude of years should teach wisdom. The Lord desires that we learn from yesterday. We are to become more Christlike each day. This is only possible by learning from yesterday. Grace cannot be granted if we continue in sin; *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?"* (Romans 6:1,2). Again we see that we must learn from yesterday and do better. Yesterday becomes my teacher. I had opportunity for experience and knowledge. I should be wiser. Only the unwise fail to learn from the yesterdays of their lives.

2. Living today to the fullest: I have only today — yesterday is gone and tomorrow may never be, but I have today. What will I do with it? This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it (Psalm 118:24). Today is filled with opportunities. I can study and pray. I can serve God, my family, my brethren, and others. E. C. McKenzie said, “The best time to do something worthwhile is between yesterday and tomorrow.” We will live to have regrets if we do not use today to the fullest. Now is the accepted time. Today hear His voice. Let there be a greater sense of urgency within us as we live this day, each day, every day for Him who loved us and died for us and before Whom we shall stand in judgment.

3. Leaning on God for tomorrow: Boast not yourself of tomorrow: “*Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth*” (Proverbs 27:1). Do not be anxious for tomorrow. We do not know the things that await us in the tomorrows that may or may not come. In view of this, the Lord teaches me to lean on Him and to trust Him and put His ways and His kingdom first in my life. Leaning on God for tomorrow gives us peace today and rest tonight. God’s presence, promises, providence, and provisions will all be in place if tomorrow comes.

Friend, the brand of tooth paste you use or the brand of clothes you wear are left to you, but please learn from yesterday, live today, and lean on God for tomorrow.

Some Traits of Paul

Most likely 1 Thessalonians was one of the first New Testament books to be written. The book is a small letter but a weighty and powerful one. It was to be read to all the holy brethren at Thessalonica. It certainly will profit us to spend some time with this epistle regularly. Each chapter contains a reference to the Lord's return, and contains lessons for our lives. Notice with me some wonderful and quite obvious traits in the life of Paul in the second chapter of this book.

1. Sincerity: Paul charged Timothy to show himself a pattern of good works in sincerity and commanded the Christians at Rome to live without hypocrisy. He lived what he preached. 1 Thessalonians 2:3 says that Paul's exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile. He never sought to please men, but God, and he did not use flattering words nor a cloak of covetousness. Glory was not sought from men. He labored night and day that he might not be chargeable to them.

2. Service: Paul had made an entrance into those at Thessalonica out of a heart of love, of service for the Lord, the church and others. He had brought the gospel message, being a servant or minister thereof. He had been entrusted with the gospel and he served well.

3. Sacrifice: Paul was willing to impart the gospel, because the Thessalonians were dear to him. Remember his labor and travail. They were in his heart when he was not with them, and he made efforts to visit. Paul often challenged others to sacrifice and he fulfilled those decrees in his own life.

4. Sanctification: Paul would later call upon these

Christians to practice sanctification, and he commended the Corinthians for theirs. They were separate, set apart, saints. This was the life Paul lived. He behaved himself with holiness, justly, and blamelessly. He was crucified with Christ and set apart from the world.

5. Soul-consciousness: Paul was interested in their souls as a father is interested in his children. The souls of the Thessalonians composed the hope, joy, glory, and crown of rejoicing for Paul. Let us all see the value of souls today. Paul was gentle as a nurse, showing his care for their souls.

6. Submission: Paul yielded to God with courage to carry out the will of God. Paul had been entrusted by God and he sought above all to please the One before whom he would stand in judgment. He preached the message God wanted preached. Let us be submissive; such affords us our only hope of entrance into heaven.

7. Spirituality: He called upon these brethren to follow him as he followed the Lord. Paul lived for the things eternal, the things unseen.

We are thankful for these wonderful traits. Follow Paul as he followed Christ.

What Is Your Life?

By inspiration, James asks a powerful question about the essence of life in James 4:14. He proceeded then to give an answer to the question. What is your life? So many miss the very purpose and mission of life. To some, life consists of the abundance of one's possessions (Luke 12:15). To others, life is a rush to eat, drink, and be merry, for soon we are here no more. Some see life as simply a rotation of generations. Let us notice four things about mankind and life.

1. The Design of Life: Man's life has been designed by God. God created man, formed him, or made him (Genesis 1:26; 2:7). God gives to all life, breath, and all things (Acts 17:25). In Him we live, move, and have our being (Acts 17:28). He sustains us. God has made man part mortal and part immortal — he has a body and a soul. Paul spoke of the outward man perishing and the inward man being renewed (2 Corinthians 4:16). Jesus spoke of the body and the soul in the same verse. Thus, each person has a body that houses a spirit (Ecclesiastes 12:7). The body will decay and die, but the spirit will live forever.

2. The Development of Life: God expects man to grow up to be something for Him and do something for Him. Life is to be used for God's glory (1 Corinthians 6:19,20). Solomon learned that the very thrust of life was living in recognition of God and His will (Ecclesiastes 12:13). There must be the growing more and more into the image of Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:18). Part of life should be lived for the good of others. We must care about others and be willing to spend and be spent for them. As we grow older, do we love the world less, do we hate sin more, are we more contented, are we more grateful, do we live more for the

spiritual, and can we really declare that life is being lived as the Lord decrees?

3. The Duration of Life: Life here in this world is brief at best. It is a vapor (James 4:14); it is like grass and a flower (1 Peter 1:24); it is like a passing cloud or a shadow (Job 14:1,2); it is swifter than a weaver's shuttle (Job 7:6); it is like a tale that is told, and we are soon cut off and fly away. You or I must leave this life some time and that could be any time, and we are most foolish if we are not ready all the time. Some live as if they have a lease on years in advance. Just look around and learn from experience. Life is brief.

4. The Destiny of Life: We have a heavenly home awaiting us (Ecclesiastes 12:5). There is life beyond the grave, and judgment awaits (Hebrews 9:27). Then, it is either eternal life or everlasting punishment. The description given in the Bible of heaven should motivate us all to resolve to put forth whatever effort is needed and make whatever sacrifices are required to obtain that place. The description of hell should prompt us all to live with the primary goal of avoiding that terrible place.

Friend, life is precious. Live it the way God prescribes. You will enjoy a life of one hundred fold and enjoy eternal life over there.

Wonderful Gifts

Many gifts are given. We all receive gifts and hopefully, we all are eager to give gifts to others. The Bible speaks of the greater blessing in giving compared to receiving (Acts 20:35). We are taught to labor with our hands that we might have something to give (Ephesians 4:28). There are many traits characterizing our great God. Among these is the eternal truth that our God is a giving God. God is not limited in His ability to give as is man. In fact, God gives to all. Let us notice four great gifts from God. We are blessed indeed if we have been the recipient of all these gifts.

1. The Gift of Life: Our lives here are gifts from God. God gives to all life, breath, and all things (Acts 17:25). It is in God that we live, move, and have our being (Acts 17:28). God originated life, and God sustains life. He gives the things necessary for life, such as food, rain, sunshine, fruitful seasons, and such like (Acts 14:17). There is nothing that we have that we did not receive (1 Corinthians 4:7). Our body and spirit belong to Him (1 Corinthians 6:19,20). Thus, life should be viewed as a gift; it should be lived to the glory of the Giver (Matthew 5:16).

2. The Gift of Christ: Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift (2 Corinthians 9:15). God so loved the world that He gave the gift of Jesus, to die for us that we might be made righteous (2 Corinthians 5:21). Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father above, and the gift of Jesus has to be the greatest gift ever given (James 1:17). God's love is manifested or proven in its greatest depth by the gift of Jesus to the world (1 John 4:8-11). Think of all the spiritual blessings found in Him. Victory is gained through Him; He is our only hope

(Colossians 1:27). Do we realize that without this gift, or in our failure to take advantage of the gift of Christ, we are without God, Christ, and hope (Ephesians 2:12)? Thanks be to the graciousness of God who gave Jesus to taste death for every man.

3. The Gift of Wisdom: God gives wisdom to His children who ask for it in faith (James 1:5,6). Prayers are not often enough characterized with pleas for wisdom. In our world of troubles and trials, we need a greater ability to make wise decisions as we seek to put to practice the great truths of the revealed will of God. Some have not because they ask not (James 4). Greater wisdom as a gift can be yours. Your life will be the richer for receiving.

4. The Gift of Heaven: The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ (Romans 6:23). In grace, we stand or have hope of the glory of God by the gracious gift of God (Romans 5:1,2). Jesus spoke of giving to His followers the gift of eternal life (John 10:27-29). No one earns heaven; we do not deserve to go there. Think of the wonderful traits of heaven. Think of being with the heavenly host and all the righteous. Think of the things here that plague us now, but will be missing there.

These are some of God's greatest gifts. Take advantage of them now.

Need for Faithfulness

A resounding theme prevails through the scriptures and that is for Christians to be faithful. The requirement is understood in the fact that we are to be loyal, dependable, and trustworthy. Often the Bible claims the faithfulness of God (Hebrews 10:23). Jesus is faithful (Revelation 1:5;3:4). Godly people like Abraham, Moses, Lydia, Tychicus, Epaphras, Onesimus, Silvanus, and Antipas were all said to be faithful. Paul refers to the faithful in Christ Jesus at Ephesus and the saints and faithful brethren in Christ at Colosse (Colossians 1:2). There is a call for faithful men (2 Timothy 2:2). As stewards we are charged to be faithful (1 Corinthians 4:2). We are even given the sobering command to be faithful even to the point of being willing to die to maintain our faithfulness. Are you faithful to the Lord? Are you diligently serving your Creator? Heaven hangs in the balance. Those who are privileged to enter heaven are referred to as the faithful (Matthew 25:21). The slothful and unfaithful will be lost (Matthew 25:26). Notice briefly a few things that cry out for our faithfulness to the Lord.

1. God's love and His mercies: Paul writes of the love of the Lord in 2 Corinthians 5:14, and the next verse calls for faithfulness. In Romans 12:1, Paul mentions the compassion of God and then calls plainly for the faithfulness of the Lord's people. Think about how good the Lord has been to us. Think of His provisions — physically and spiritually. Isn't it just reasonable and logical that we faithfully serve our Maker?

2. The judgment of God: In view of our accountability to the Lord, we must be faithful. Oh, what a sobering thought it is to know that one day we will stand before the Lord in the judg-

ment (Acts 17:24-31). You do not want to present yourself before the throne of God in a less than faithful state. The faithful and prepared will hear the sweet invitation to life eternally with God (Matthew 25:34).

3. The resurrection and eternity: The resurrection is discussed in 1 Corinthians 15. The last verse of the chapter is a call to be faithful. This world is not the total of our existence. We will be raised to live eternally. Faithfulness is the key to readiness, it will not be in vain but will be rewarded by the Lord (Hebrews 6:10).

4. The power of Satan: 1 Peter 5:8 speaks of the mission and power of Satan. In view of this, verse nine is a call for us to be faithful to resist his pressures. Those not determined, those not diligent, and the uncommitted will fall victim to Satan. To resist falling, Peter cried out for faithfulness (2 Peter 1:5-11).

5. The basis of who Christians are: This, too, is a call for faithfulness. 2 Timothy 2 refers to Christians as soldiers, farmers, and athletes. Each of these calls for diligent efforts to be successful.

Are you faithful? If the end were today, could you say along with Paul, I have fought a good fight, kept the faith, and finished the race? If you could not, why not begin anew this day, before it is eternally too late.

Do Not Be Ignorant

Paul often made the statement that he did not want his readers to be ignorant of certain things. The phrase, "*I would not have you ignorant*", is found in the Roman letter, the Corinthian letters, and the first letter to the brethren at Thessalonia. Because of the value of souls, Paul did not want people to be in ignorance. Out of respect for truth and the realization we shall all be judged by the same, Paul did not want people to be in ignorance. Because of concern for the anxieties of others, Paul at times turned ignorance and darkness into light and knowledge.

Ignorance of the Bible has potentially devastating effects. Yet, there is an abundance of ignorance of God's will and way. Paul in Romans 10:3 spoke of some who were ignorant of God's righteousness. Peter wrote of those who were willingly ignorant. Do these verses also describe our day? We have a Bible, and it is available to us in the English translation that we can all read and study. We have ample opportunities to study and cast off the darkness of ignorance. Yet, most of us could do better in this area than we do. There is a famine in the land of hearing God's word (Amos 8:11), but this one is of our own choosing. We have to spurn ample privileges to continue in this famine.

Let us become better students of God's word. May we crave the word as a baby craves milk (1 Peter 2:2). Let us hunger and thirst for it (Matthew 5:6). Let us seek and search for knowledge and wisdom as the world does for silver or for a hidden treasure in a field (Proverbs 2:1-5). Follow the example of the Bereans and search the scriptures daily (Acts 17:11). You will be here, and in eternity, so thankful you did.

In 2 Peter 3:8 Peter told his readers and us to not be ignorant concerning a certain matter. Our souls hang in the balance unless we learn likewise. Notice the following:

- 1. Be not ignorant of the plan of salvation.** God has a plan laid out simply in His word. Learn it and obey to be free (John 8:32).
- 2. Be not ignorant of the church.** Jesus died for it and is Savior of it (Ephesians 5:23). Salvation is therein. It is a part of God's eternal plan. Don't be ignorant of it.
- 3. Be not ignorant of true worship.** We must worship, and we must be classified as true worshippers (John 4:23). The aim of our worship to God must be done in spirit and truth (John 4:23).
- 4. Be not ignorant of the life the Lord demands of us all.** We are held accountable to be people of holiness, obedient, and faithful. Search the scriptures to find the demands of our Creator.
- 5. Be not ignorant of death, judgment and eternity.** The Bible will prepare the obedient for these great upcoming events. Every person alive will deal with these matters. You do not have to be in the dark. We can walk as children of light even in these matters.

It is a serious thing to have access to the Bible. Find the joys of knowing the Lord through His word. A life of a hundred fold awaits.

When We Come Together

An interesting phrase is found four times in 1 Corinthians 11. That phrase is "*when ye come together*". It has reference to times when the church assembled together for worship to God. It is very serious to come together before God to worship Him. A thread of worship to God is woven from Genesis to Revelation. There are many things that can be learned from studying this often mentioned phrase in 1 Corinthians 11. Notice a few of them:

- 1. When we come together we obey a command of God.** The Lord seeks our worship. In Matthew 4:10 Christ commanded worship. The church at Corinth assembled together as a group. We are charged to not forsake assembling together (Hebrews 10:25). Coming together with the church, or as the church, is the responsibility of every Christian. Let us obey this command with joy and gladness. Obedience is at the very heart of many aspects about worship.
- 2. When we come together we should have great reverence for God.** We assemble to pay worth to the object of our worship. God is the object. He is our Maker (Psalm 95:6). We pour out our adoration to Him. God is great and good, is all powerful, all knowing, and ever present. The very essence of worship demands reverence for God. This would keep one from worshipping to be seen of men (Matthew 6). This would keep one from praising God with tongue and lips and the heart being far removed from Him (Matthew 16:8,9). This will cause us to come in sincerity, humility, and with all the soul (1 Corinthians 14:15).
- 3. When we come together there is to be respect for**

truth. God has always laid down divine regulations for acceptable worship. Abel pleased God in worship because he did it by faith (Hebrews 11:4). Nadab and Abihu were destroyed because of lack of respect for God's word guiding their worship to God (Leviticus 10:1,2). John 4:24 commands our worship to be done in truth. All we do or teach is to be within the confines of authority from the Lord (Colossians 3:17). Respecting the truth, let us sing, teach, give, commune, and pray.

4. When we come together there is love shown for each other. 1 Corinthians 11 commanded the Corinthians to have love and consideration one for another. Because of interest for one another, Christians should long to assemble. We teach, exhort and encourage each other to stand and endure in the battle and race toward heaven.

5. When we come together blessings will come to us. We do not assemble with personal motives in mind; we assemble to give to God that which He deserves, but at the same time blessings will come to us. We will receive strength and encouragement (Hebrews 10:24,25). We will become more like the God we worship. It contributes to our assurance of heaven and pleasing God.

God does not expect the impossible of us. If we cannot assemble for reasons beyond our control, we are not responsible to do so. But if we can, and you know and God knows if you can, then He expects us to do so. You will be glad you did.

Being Stirred Up

Paul waited for Silas and Timothy at Athens. As he waited, he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. This stirred Paul's spirit within him (Acts 17:16). The Lord's spirit was stirred at the greed and hypocrisy of His own people. The prodigal son in Luke 15 had his spirit stirred when he looked at the pitiful condition that sin had brought upon his own soul and life. There is a sense in which we all ought to be stirred within our spirits. There is a sense in which we can be angry and not sin (Ephesians 4:26). Is there anything that stirs your spirit? What do we do when such happens? We as Christians ought to be stirred within our spirits today for many reasons. We ought to be moved because of things in the world, things in the church, and things in our own lives.

1. Stirred because of things in the world. Paul saw this city of Athens in Acts 17 given to idolatry. He knew idols were nothing, that they could not help those people, and he knew they were not to be worshiped. Paul also knew that those who practice such cannot go to heaven (Galatians 5:19-21). Paul knew the confusion that these people lived with. His spirit was stirred to preach to them about the one true God, and he did so. Our spirits ought to be stirred because of the division that is in the world religiously. Think of the lack of knowledge that plagues our world spiritually. See a world living in sin and ungodliness, a world of hate and selfishness. See the world that lives for the now and stands unprepared to meet God. Death is ever present. Satan is hardening hearts, yet the Lord could return at any time. So many are lost. Let our spirits be stirred to action.

2. Stirred because of things in the church. Jesus in John

2 and Matthew 21 could see what people within the confines of true religion were doing that was so opposed to the truth. People, out of love for material things, were taking advantage of others. The Lord saw the temple being used for wrongful purposes. Look within the church today and see worldliness and liberalism abounding. Have we lost our love for God and His word? See the indifference on the part of many. People are haphazard in their service. God is not given first place. Love for God is divided with other things taking priority. Apostasy abounds within the church. So many walk no more with the Lord. Does this not stir our spirits?

3. Stirred because of things in our own lives. The prodigal son came to himself. He did not like what he saw (Luke 15:17). He saw sin and waywardness, and a hopeless future. As we look within and examine ourselves, what do we see? Are we faithful? Are we zealous for God? Is the Lord and His kingdom given priority in our lives? Is sin creeping back into our lives? Are our affections on things above?

Let our spirits be stirred because of things that ought to promote change within. May we not simply sit idle but be moved to action.

Will We Do All the Lord Has Said?

“And Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the Lord hath said will we do” (Exodus 24:3). The same sentiments of heart are expressed again in verse 7. This forms such a lovely spirit. The children of Israel failed to live up to such noble intentions in life. Think what problems they would have avoided if only they had lived true to this ambition throughout their lives. Do we have these sentiments toward the requirements the Lord has made of us?

Many have lived by this lofty aim in life. Genesis 6:22 says that Noah did according to all that God commanded him. Read of the lovely obedient spirit of Abraham as he lived within the dictates of the Lord’s desires (Genesis 12,22). See the spirit that reigned within the heart of Samuel as he said, *“Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth”* (1 Samuel 3:9). Follow the Lord as He always did the things that pleased the Father (John 8:29). Abel continues to speak today by his obedient life (Hebrews 11:4). Be challenged by the mother of our Lord as she exhorts others to do whatever the Lord commands. Read about Cornelius as he immediately sends for Peter when he is told to do so. We rejoice to read of the eunuch as he pleads for the opportunity to put the Lord on in baptism. Paul commended the Bereans for their readiness to receive the word of God (Acts 17:11). 1 John 3:22 speaks of being blessed for being obedient and doing the things that please the Father. The Bible plainly teaches about heaven being

granted to us on conditions as to whether or not we possess the obedient spirit. Christ is author of eternal salvation to the obedient (Hebrews 5:9). Those who are obedient have the right to the tree of life and the privilege to enter the city of heaven (Revelation 22:14).

Are you obedient to the Lord's commands? He is Lord, Maker, and Creator. We are accountable as His creatures. May our lives be as such becomes His word (Philippians 1:27). May all we do or teach be done under His direction (Colossians 3:17). We shall be judged by His word (John 12:48). To maintain this lovely spirit we will have to buffet our own fleshly desires, be different than unbelievers, and live contrary to the life styles of the majority. But the reward will be worth the sacrifices we make. Will we do all that the Lord has said in the following areas?

1. The matter of worship: Do we worship today in sincerity, humility, whole-heartedly, and within the dictates of the New Testament? True worship involves singing (without instruments), praying, giving, teaching, and partaking of the Lord's Supper each Lord's day.

2. The matter of the plan of salvation: What the Lord has said we must do: hear (Acts 3:23), believe (John 8:24), repent (Acts 17:30), confess (Romans 10:1) and be baptized (Mark 16:16) to be saved.

3. The matter of faithfulness and godliness: Be faithful even if it means death (Revelation 2:10). Without holiness we can't go to heaven (Hebrews 12:14).

Will you do all the Lord has said? You will one day be glad you did.

Three Things Cornelius Wanted to Do

There are many great lessons that can be gained by studying the things said about Cornelius recorded in Acts. In this setting, let us notice three things about Cornelius in relationship to what he did and how he felt as he awaited the arrival of Peter, whom God had appointed to preach the message of salvation to him and his family.

1. The invitation was extended to others. As Cornelius waited for Peter to come, he used this time to call together his kinsmen and near friends (Acts 10:24). There was love shown for others to learn what to do to be saved (Acts 11:14). There was grace, which Peter would tell them about (Acts 15:11). Cornelius did not want these people to be lost. He used his influence to expose them to truth.

2. The heart was receptive to truth. Cornelius had been told to send for Peter who would tell him what he ought to do (Acts 10:6). He would tell him words whereby salvation could come (Acts 11:14). Cornelius eagerly awaited the privilege to hear, and when Peter came, he let him know that they had presented themselves with the purpose to hear the commands of the Lord. After being taught, Cornelius was willing to obey.

3. His spirit was urgent to act. Notice in Acts 10:33 the response of Cornelius to what the angel had told him to do. Immediately he obeyed. He was commanded to be baptized and he obeyed. Let us cultivate a greater sense of urgency. The door of opportunity can be closed at any time for us or for any others.

Death can come or the Lord could return. Hearts can be hardened. Let us lift up our eyes to a harvest that is white with opportunities to save some. As we toil, to save all would be impossible, to save some is imperative, and to save none would be tragic.

Obey Now

In the last article we noticed why we ought to obey God. Many have future plans for obeying God and thus becoming a Christian and being faithful. Many who have drifted from God have future plans of some day being restored. It is vitally important that we obey God. But think how important it is for us to obey God now! Many will be found disobedient to God because although not planning to fail, they failed to plan. Do you realize how important it is to obey God? Begin now! Turn the word "now" around and you have the word "won". You will win if you obey God now and ever be urgent to keep ready. Notice with me some reasons why you should obey God now:

1. Obey now to have the best life on earth. Think of the good life you are missing that can never be recalled. Do not wait any longer because you are living less than the abundant life. You are missing out on blessings that could be yours. There is hope, joy, direction, peace, assurance, prayer and other things available but only to those in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). Your life will be enriched now, and think how others will be blessed if you will obey God now.

2. Obey now because it will be harder later. It will be easier to obey now than later. Sin enslaves; the heart can be hardened. The nature of sin and Satan is to deceive (Hebrews 3:13). With time, some completely lose the desire to obey God. A sad day has arrived when a man's conscience becomes seared and he is past feeling. His destiny is on the verge of being sealed yet while he lives.

3. Obey now because of the influence you have now. No

man lives to himself. You are influencing others now. Your friends need to see your obedience now. Opportunities to do good are passing and can never be retrieved. Be a faithful Christian **now** for those around you.

4. Obey now because God deserves your loyalty now. Reflect over the goodness that God has bestowed upon you in the past and that of which He continues to do each day. The Lord does not deserve to be treated that way. Do not put off doing for Him what all should do always.

5. Obey now because now may be the only time you have. Time could suddenly be no more. Death could come at any moment. The Lord could return at any given time. The Bible talks about being ready for death (2 Timothy 4:8). It speaks about being ready for the Lord's return. Are you ready? 2 Chronicles 22:5 tells about David preparing abundantly for something before his death. Genesis 45:28 speaks of Jacob's plans to do something before he died. If you are planning to obey God or to come home to Him, do it now, because death may find you unprepared. The door of opportunity will be closed at the Lord's return. You may now be living in the final part of your opportunities to live for God.

Obey God. You should. You should to do it **NOW!!**

Consequences of Failure

We all hear quotes, proverbs, or general sayings from time to time. Some are good and even thought provoking, and some are not. Some agree with Biblical principles and some do not. I did hear one recently that does agree with so many principles of the Bible. The quote was that “Failure follows the path of least persistence”. The willingness to persevere does affect so many areas of our lives. Lack of persistence can bring failure in school, work, and play. It can also bring failure in some very critical areas of our relationship to the Lord. Notice a few of the failures that come when we put forth little persistence.

1. Failure to reach heaven: The biblical exhortation about reaching heaven is plain. We must persist. We have need of endurance or patience to receive this promise (Hebrews 10:36). He that endures to the end will be saved. Think of those who failed to reach Canaan. Then the writer warns us about failing to reach heaven. Labor to enter heaven. We will partake if we hold on to the end (Hebrews 3:14). The Lord spoke of one who failed to persist as being unfit for heaven (Luke 9:62). We must keep working toward our salvation (Philippians 2:12). Becoming a Christian is imperative, but to keep on keeping on is equally important. Please don’t miss heaven because you have grown weary. Start anew; we will reap if we faint not (Galatians 6:9).

2. Failure to grow in knowledge: The price for knowing God’s will is persistence. Search for knowledge as for silver and hidden treasures. Hunger and thirst for it. Crave it as a baby does milk. How much effort do we put forth to know God’s will? Lack of knowledge can cause us to err (Matthew 22:29) and can bring destruction. Persist in study, worship, and meditation.

Lack of persistence will yield failure.

3. Failure to become more like Christ: This takes persistence. 2 Corinthians 3:18 speaks of the gradual but continual transformation to the likeness of Jesus. Romans 6:22 speaks of pressing toward holiness. It takes effort to become like Jesus. This is done with study, sacrifice, and denial. With every day that passes we should have a goal of renewing the inward man toward the Lord and spiritual things (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). It will take great persistence to say “NO” to evil and “YES” to the Lord.

4. Failure to develop as servants for God: As Christians we are accountable to mature and develop our abilities in greater service for God. Matthew 25 teaches that it is our responsibility to do what we can. Hebrews 5:12 teaches us to put forth effort to grow from babes to mature Christians. We will fail in this duty unless we persist.

Like Paul, let us “press on”. Let us not fail in our quest for these great goals.

How Many Debts Do You Have?

How many debts do you have? The list of things on which we owe might be almost endless it seems. Some people owe few or none of the debts that gain most of our attention, but all people are in debt. In Romans 1:14 Paul referred to himself as a debtor. He made reference to a debt owed by Philemon in verse 19 of the book of Philemon. In Romans 15:27 Paul spoke of the indebtedness of the Gentiles. Jesus, in the model prayer in Matthew 6:12, spoke of debts that need to be considered. Have you recently considered what you owe? Notice with me three areas of debt we have as Christians and certainly there are others.

1. Indebted to heaven: Think about the blessings we have received from the Lord. Every good gift is from above (James 1:17). The sun, rain, seasons, food, and thousands of other physical blessings we receive from heaven. Think of the spiritual blessings found in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). It is by the Lord's favor or grace that we are saved. We have in no wise earned our salvation from sin but it is by mercy. We have no reason to boast, because salvation is a gift. The Lord has paid a debt that we made. Thanks be to God for the victory through Jesus. God owes me nothing, but, Oh, the debt that I owe Him! Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:14,15 says that such love constrains me to live for Jesus. He first loved us. Let us make Christ our life. Let us give ourselves to the Lord. Are you aware of the debt you have to Heaven?

2. Indebted to the lost: *"I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise"*, said Paul in Romans 1:14. The Christian is truly in debt to the lost. I owe the lost the opportunity that has been afforded me. We are

charged to go to others with the gospel that they might be saved. Think of the debt we owe the erring Christians. Many have turned aside; we are charged to restore the erring (James 5:19,20). The faithful have obligations to the unfaithful (Galatians 6:1). Who will reach out to any and all the lost if we do not? Have you considered recently your obligations and indebtedness to the lost?

3. Indebted to the saved: In Romans 13:8, Paul spoke of a debt of love that we owe to all. He said to the Corinthians that he would very gladly spend and be spent for them (2 Corinthians 12:15). We are to serve one another, do good to all, and be forgiving, forbearing, and compassionate toward others. I owe others the kindness I have received from heaven (Ephesians 4:32). I owe other Christians exhortation and faithfulness in worship. They need me in worship and I need others. Be an example of the believers. Have you considered recently your indebtedness to the saved?

Think about the debts we owe. This should humble us all.
“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord...”

Things We Cannot Have if Sin Is in Our Lives

Old Testament writings are preserved for our learning. Such has been given to us for our admonition (1 Corinthians 10:11). There are things to imitate, such as the faith of Abraham (Romans 4:12). Likewise, there are things to shun, such as the failures of the Children of Israel. All scripture study is truly profitable for us (2 Timothy 3:16). No man can truly partake of the sobering words of Jeremiah 5 and remain the same. This chapter reveals Judah's sins and speaks of the impending punishment. It vividly reminds us that God is not mocked and that man will reap as he has sown.

One of the most challenging verses is verse 25. It says that their sins have turned away precious blessings and such sins had caused the Lord to withhold good things from them. Are we cheating ourselves because of sin? Am I deprived of good things because of sin in my life? Think of a few things which can never be ours where sin reigns dominant in our lives.

1. The best life possible on earth: Is the best life withheld from you because of sin? Good days are promised the righteous (1 Peter 3:10,11). There is joy in the Lord, and joy in the kingdom. This joy is full in the Lord and His word. There is no peace to the wicked. The way of the transgressor is hard (Proverbs 13:15). The life of sin is not the good life; see the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15. Think of the assurance and hope the Christian has (Hebrews 6:18,19). Living for the Lord makes better families. Do we not all want this? Think of the promises in

Christ. See the promise of all things working together for the Christian's good (Romans 8:28) and see the provisions promised if we put the church and the Lord's righteousness first. Prayer is reserved for the righteous. Is sin withholding this life from you?

2. Forgiveness from the Lord: When sin reigns in our lives, the Lord's forgiveness, mercy, and compassion are withheld from us. All people could benefit from the Lord's mercy, but most will not. Sin separates us from the Lord (Isaiah 59:1,2). Forgiveness and remission of sins are granted to those who turn from sin to live lives of holiness. 1 John 1:7 holds forth the blessing of cleansing in the blood of Christ, but only for those who continually walk by the light of the Lord's will and way. We could never be pleasing to God without mercy, but mercy will be withheld unless we are seekers of righteousness.

3. Heaven at the end of the way: Sin withholds the greatest of blessings from men. Among these is heaven. Nothing that defiles can enter heaven (Revelation 21:27). If we live and die in sin, we can't go to be with the Lord. Only the pure and holy shall see God and heaven. Those dominated by sin shall not inherit heaven.

Of what is sin robbing you? Sin withholds good from us. Renounce sin and live for God. You will be glad now and forever.

Five Things that Will Keep Us from Seeing Heaven

There are many marvelous things to be seen in this world. God's creation is wonderful. We will never see so many of the mighty works of the hand of God. We should not be interested in seeing all the things, because our lives would be consumed with this quest. Many love and serve the creature more than the Creator (Romans 1:25). There is enough on every side to persuade us to believe that God is. Yet, there is one goal that we should all have in common, and that is to one day see God and Heaven. As the song says, "what a day, glorious day that will be." We will never see heaven and God without living for Him. Notice five things that we must have if we expect to see heaven:

1. Without proper love, we will not see heaven: Heaven is promised to those who love God. James 1:12 promises heaven to them that love God. Colossians 3:1-4 speaks of our hope of heaven and links it to loving spiritual things. A man will be accursed by God if he does not love. Do you love the Bible, the church, righteousness, and all other things related to the Lord? You will never see heaven without proper love.

2. Without holiness, we will not see heaven: Jesus said the pure in heart will see God (Matthew 5:8). Without holiness, no man will see the Lord. The ungodly will find themselves on the outside of heaven (Revelation 22:15). Galatians 5:19-21 mentions many forms of ungodliness and states that they who live as such cannot enter heaven. Are you set apart from the world? Do you live a holy, righteous, and godly life? Without it, you can't go to heaven.

3. Without compassion, we will not see heaven: A man lacking in compassion is lacking in the love of God that ought to be in his life (1 John 3:17,18). A lack of compassion shows an ungrateful heart. The judgment scene depicted in Matthew 25 teaches that a lack of compassion toward others renders us unfit for heaven. As such, we are not like Christ (Matthew 9:36). You will never see heaven without compassion.

4. Without obedience, we will never see heaven: Christ is the author of eternal salvation, but only to the obedient (Hebrews 5:8,9). Those who are disobedient to the commands of the Lord cannot enter Heaven. He that does the will of the Lord will enter Heaven. Without obedience, you will never see Heaven.

5. Without endurance, we will never see heaven: The promise of heaven is granted to those who endure (Hebrews 10:36). Such who endure will be saved (Matthew 10:22). He who turns away is not fit for heaven. Only he who holds fast to the end will partake of heaven (Hebrews 3:14). Let us overcome so we can go over to be with God.

Friend, will you see God and Heaven? The people who will are folks of love, holiness, compassion, obedience, and faithfulness.

Precious Promises

Exceeding great and precious promises are extended to the people of God. Because of the Lord's concern for us, His ability and His faithfulness, His promises are sure. What would life be without them? Oh, how dark the unknown future would be without them. Think how precious and comforting the promises of God were to the Thessalonian brethren, the scattered Christians who received Peter's letters, the Hebrew Christians, and the faithful in Asia when Revelation was penned. Notice some of the promises of God as they relate to some key relationships with our Father.

1. God's presence: In Hebrews 13:5,6 He promises to be with us and never to leave nor forsake us. The Lord is with us in crossing Jordan. As we labor for Him, He is with us and ever helping us (1 Corinthians 3:6,9).

2. God's pardon: God promises to pardon if we come on proper terms to Him. Hebrews 8:12 speaks of His mercy toward our unrighteousness. We, like those in Acts 2, can have our sins remitted. God promises so. He is no respecter of persons. God promises to forgive those who hear, believe, repent, confess, and are baptized. 1 John 1:7 lays down the promise of continued pardon if we are faithful.

3. God's providence: Think of the promises of God that have to do with provisions and protection from God. God in many ways provides for all. He makes the sun to rise and rain to fall on all, but there are precious promises to God's people in this area. He promises to meet our needs if we seek Him first. All things work together for good to them that love the Lord

(Romans 8:28). The eyes and ears of God are attuned to the righteous, and He promises to make a way of escape available in the hour of temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13). Remove worry, because God cares (Philippians 4:6).

4. God's peace: There is no peace for the wicked (Isaiah 58:20,21). But think of the promise of peace to the Christian. There is a peace from God that keeps our hearts and minds that passes understanding (Philippians 4:7). There is a peace of God that rules in the heart of God's child. Look at the epistles of the New Testament and see them introduced with a message of peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We are God's children with assurance of an inheritance.

5. God's paradise: He that overcomes is promised to have the privilege to eat of the tree of life, in the midst of the paradise of God (Revelation 2:7). There is a crown of life promised by the Lord to them that love Him (James 1:12). The Lord says be faithful and you will receive the great reward. Let us then hold fast because He is faithful who promised. Be faithful unto death and you will be rewarded with heaven, are the words of Revelation 2:10. Such hope serves as an anchor to the soul. Our labors will not be in vain.

God is faithful, the Lord is powerful, He cares, thus His promises are sure.

Different Kinds of Works

The Bible speaks of salvation by several different means. Things such as the blood of Christ, grace, faith, hope, obedience, baptism and such like all go together, bringing about the salvation of man from sin. In like manner, the Bible says we are saved by works (James 2:24). But the Bible also says we are not saved by works (Ephesians 2:8,9). This must imply that there are various kinds of works. It is very interesting to note some of the things recorded in the New Testament about the various works or deeds of men. It is imperative that we understand the role of works in salvation. Notice with me five kinds of works.

1. Works of the flesh: Many live dominated by the fleshly desires of the body. The deeds they do reveal that they are undisciplined in life. Galatians 5:19-21 mentions several such works. Think of fornication, adultery, murders, drunkenness and many other evil deeds. Philippians 3:18,19 speaks of such folks as minding earthly things, as enemies of the cross, as glorying in the shameful things, and their belly is their God. Paul recorded in Galatians 5:21 that as such they could not enter heaven. These works do not justify but do bring condemnation.

2. Works of the Law of Moses: In Romans 3 Paul spoke of the failure in the ability of the law to justify. The law brought man to Christ but after Christ the law was abolished. It had weaknesses. Christ nailed it to the cross. No man can be justified by doing the deeds of that law. One has fallen from grace who will turn from Christ to do the work of that obsolete law (Galatians 5:4). So again, these works do not justify, but leave one outside of Christ, without hope.

3. Works to be seen of men: Matthew 23:5 tells of Pharisees who did certain works, but their motive was to be seen of men. It is sad to have such shameful motives. Matthew 6 speaks of some who gave, prayed, and fasted all to the glory of men. God knows the heart. The only reward for such deeds, although they might be good in many ways, is the praise received here of men. Such works have no justifying qualities.

4. Works of merit: No man can earn his way to justification or heaven. We are saved by grace through faith and not of meritorious works. We have nothing to boast about. Salvation ultimately comes by the Lord's mercy and not by our works or deeds of righteousness (Titus 3:5). Good deeds are a must (Galatians 6:10) but they in themselves will not bring salvation. Good deeds will be done because of salvation, but not solely for salvation. Such works fall far short of having power to cleanse sin.

5. Works of faith: Here are the works that justify. A faith that works obedience is one that avails (Galatians 5:6). James 2:24 speaks of justification from an obedient faith. Deeds that flow from humble hearts obedient to the every command of the Lord bring justification. This person is ever meeting the conditions laid down by the law and the grace of the Lord. Let us be mindful that we will give account for our deeds.

Four Responsibilities

Christians are referred to in Hebrews 4:9 as the people of God. Peter in 1 Peter 2:9,10 would say that only after our conversion are we the people of God. In a very special sense we are the Lord's people. He bought us and thus we belong to Him (1 Corinthians 6:19,20). He did not force us to be His people. We responded to His invitation. Being His people, there are many responsibilities that come our way. Please notice with me four of these.

1. People of purpose: The people of God have a noble purpose in this life. Man's primary mission does not have to do with pleasures and treasures. Solomon said in the long ago that to fear God and keep His commands was the whole duty of man (Ecclesiastes 12:13). The New Testament plainly bears this same purpose. We are here to please God (1 Thessalonians 4:1). Our labors are to have judgment day in mind and being acceptable to the Lord. Life is not bound up in possessions and we are to be laying up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21). Our thrust is to be such that God is glorified (Matthew 5:16). Our affections and labors are to be geared toward the spiritual (Colossians 3:1,2). God loves all and all have potential for heaven. The choice is now yours and mine. The people of God have a great, high, and noble purpose while here.

2. People of purity: The people of God have the awesome responsibility of living pure lives. "*Keep thyself pure*" were the words of Paul to Timothy. Jesus said the pure in heart would see God (Matthew 5:8). The Hebrews penman wrote that unless we are holy we will never be privileged to enter heaven and be with the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). Those dominated by sins of the flesh

shall not enter heaven, according to Galatians 5:19-21. The Bible closes by saying no sin can enter heaven (Revelation 21:27) and the ungodly will be on the outside (Revelation 22:15). The Bible is our standard and Jesus our pattern. Let us live lives of purity.

3. People of prayer: It is imperative that the people of God be a people of prayer. In prayer we honor God, ask petitions, offer thanks, and make confession of sins. Are not these vital to our spiritual lives? Jesus got up early to pray and at times prayed all night. We are taught to continue in prayer and be dependent upon prayer (Colossians 4:2). There are so many areas of concern in our lives that demand prayer. Yes, we are to be people of prayer.

4. People of power: God expects His people to be a people of power. God has granted us the means to be strong (2 Timothy 1:7). We can be strong in Christ. We are to add self-control and moral courage to our faith (2 Peter 1:5-7). It takes power for us to endure. We must overcome discouragement, and maybe even persecution. We must not grow weary. We must say “no” to sin. Yes, we are to be a people of power.

God’s people have a unique future heaven for the faithful. Let us face our responsibilities. How are we faring as the people of God?

Four Realities

Surely the grandest privilege in this world is the one afforded us to be Christians. When all is said and done, very little else really matters. The Christian wears the name of our Lord (Acts 11:26). His life is to be without doubt immersed in Christ. One is to be challenged daily to ask what would Jesus do and how would Jesus desire me to react to this or that. Paul referred to Christ as our life and to being crucified with Christ and Christ as living in him (Galatians 2:20). He spoke of the Lord being magnified by his efforts. With Christ as our life, notice the following four things that absolutely must be brought to reality.

1. The love of Christ ought to be appreciated: Christ gave Himself for us (Galatians 1:4). Christ died for you and me (Galatians 2:20). He loved us and washed us from our sins in His blood. He loved us to the utmost (John 13:1). Are we thankful? Do we really appreciate it? Paul was thankful for it. Such love constrained Paul to a life of service back to the Lord. Heaven is conditional as to whether or not we appreciate that love enough to respond in love and gratitude toward our Lord (James 1:12). Any and all who fail in loving Jesus as they ought will be accursed by the Lord (1 Corinthians 16:22). Thanks be to our Lord for such a love for such unworthy people that gives us hope beyond this world, even heaven itself.

2. The Lordship and law of Christ to which we must be submissive: The Bible on numerous occasions refers to Christ as Lord. He is to be our Ruler and Master; He has authority over us and to Him we must submit. God has made Him Lord and King (Acts 2:36). To Him and His Word we must give account in judgment (Romans 2:16). He is truly above all, and we must honor

His law. The Lord is the author of eternal salvation to the obedient (Hebrews 5:8,9). All we do in word and deed is to be within the confines of His will. If we fail to obey, we will be punished. Yes, we must be submissive to the lordship and law of Christ.

3. The life of Christ that should be imitated: Is Jesus your model? Are you striving to live like Jesus? We are to be changed into His image (Romans 8:29). We are to follow in His steps (1 Peter 2:21). He is the one perfect model because He never sinned (Hebrews 4:15). Study His marvelous life. Imitate it. Your life will be enriched and you will be walking in a state of pleasing the Father.

4. The land of Christ that ought to be sought: Paul had an ardent desire to live with the Lord (Philippians 1:23). Jesus spoke of mansions prepared where we would live with the Father and His Son. He spoke of striving to enter that land. The characteristics of that place serve as motivating factors to want to go (Revelation 21:4). We have a map to go there, and everyone is invited. How sad to miss it!

These things will further help us all live the Christ-centered life.

Boasting – Good and Bad

The verb form of the word “glory” means “to boast or to rejoice”. It is interesting to note in the Bible that some rejoicing is vain, but some is valid and proper. Would you notice with me some areas wherein boasting would be vain and some of those where it would be valid.

1. Vain glorying: Paul wrote of perilous times characterized by the guilt of wrongful boasting (2 Timothy 3:2). We should not glory in riches (1 Timothy 6:17). Do not allow your heart to be given to these things. Do not glory in earthly wisdom (Jeremiah 9:23,24). Many of the Gentiles gloried in wisdom. Some glory in might and power. Galatians 6:13 is an example of some glorying in power over others. Again, this is not a place for boasting. Some glory in sinful, shameful things (Philippians 3:19). Think how the church at Corinth gloried in the sin there. Paul said such was not good. Some want glory toward themselves. 1 Corinthians 13:4 says that love vaunteth not **itself**. Paul in Galatians 5:26 said for **us** not to seek vain glory. Here is a glory for self. In Romans 12:3, we are warned to not think more highly of ourselves than we ought. Paul said he had not sought glory of men, neither of the brethren, or of others. He said of himself that he would not glory (2 Corinthians 12:5,6). James condemned some in James 4:13-16 for glorying in their abilities and their feeling of security for the future. Proverbs 27:1 says to not boast yourself of tomorrow for you do not know what shall be tomorrow. Read chapters 11 and 12 of 2 Corinthians and see Paul put into the uncomfortable position of being “forced” to appear to glory at his own defense. I hope our hearts are like his. Let us notice some things in which we should glory.

2. Valid glorying: There are some things in which we can glory or rejoice and even boast. Let us glory in our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul in Romans 5:11 said we joy or glory in God for what He has done through Jesus. "*He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord*", says 1 Corinthians 1:31. Paul said we rejoice in Christ Jesus and unto Him be glory (Ephesians 3:21). To the Lord be glory for ever and ever (Galatians 1:5). Let us glory in the cross (Galatians 6:14). Here is where my boasting and true joy must lie. I owe it all to the Lord and His sacrifice. May we glory in our tribulations (Romans 5:3). Herein do we find refinement and discipline to the soul. Herein is material to make us better. Let us take joy in the things that improve our quality. Let us glory in the good things among God's people. Paul gloried in the faith and spiritual growth of the Thessalonians. He gloried in the good things about the Corinthian brethren. He gloried when they turned from error. Let us glory in our infirmities (2 Corinthians 10:9). They can bring greater dependence on God. This goes against the grain, does it not? Let us glory in hope (Romans 5:2). This ought to put a song in our souls. Let us glory in praise for God (James 1:9). It is only here that I have a right to glory.

So let us glory, but in the proper sources. It will all be worthwhile when God glorifies us.

Behold

The word “behold” is often used in the Bible to mean “to take notice thereof”. There are so many things of which we would do well if we would behold or take notice. In John 19:5, Pilate said to behold the man Jesus. In John 1, twice John the Baptizer made reference to beholding the man Jesus, the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29,36). Let us take notice of the man Jesus, the man’s mission, the man’s message, the man’s miracles, and the man’s mansions.

1. Behold the Man: Jesus is our model by which to live. Let us follow Him (John 21:22). He left us an example (1 Peter 2:21). His mind is to be in us (Philippians 2:5). We are to look at Him as a mirror and strive to be like Him. We are to be conformed to His image. We wear His name, which implies that we live like Him. Behold the man Jesus. Take notice of His humility, forgiveness, compassion, meekness, obedience, prayerfulness, love for souls, love for His enemies, good works, interest in the lost, purity, priorities and all the other great traits of Jesus. Behold His hands, His feet, and riven side (Luke 24:39). One day you will take notice of Him (Romans 14:11,12). Please don’t wait until judgment.

2. Behold the Man’s mission: Jesus came because of His interest in man. He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). He came that men might have abundant life (John 10:10). Jesus came to do the will of the Father — He lived to please the Father (John 8:29). The Lord’s mission was to do good (Acts 10:38). Jesus came to establish the church (Matthew 16:18). Our mission has to do with saving the lost, extending heaven’s invitation, and glorifying, obeying, and pleasing the Father.

3. Behold the Man's message: We must take notice of the Lord's message. The Lord's words are spirit and life. They are words of eternal life. The earth will pass, but not these words (Matthew 24:35). These words will judge us in the last day (John 12:48). To be wise, we must heed the Lord's message.

4. Behold the Man's miracles: Except we believe in Jesus as the Son of God we will die in sin (John 8:24). Part of the motivating power for us to believe in Jesus is found in His power. Take notice of His power in creation. His works testify of who Jesus is (John 5:36). Take notice of the miracles He did. Many are recorded that we might believe (John 20:30,31). Behold such power.

5. Behold the Man's mansions: Let us take notice of the Lord's mansions. In John 14:1-3 Jesus spoke of that place of the great reward. The inheritance is incorruptible, undefiled and fades not away (1 Peter 1:3-5). This glorious place is one of no tears, pain, sorrow, death, crying, night, hunger, or sin. The alternative is just the very opposite.

6. Behold the traits of God: There are so many notable traits of our heavenly Father. May we forever take notice. 1 John 3:1 says to "*behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us.*" God's love is unheard of in this world, so to speak. Paul in Ephesians 2:4 referred as great love. John 3:16 says He so loved us that He gave us His Son. His love toward us was unconditional. He did not love us if we did so and so, but He loved us in spite of our unworthiness and in spite of our sins. Take notice of such love. Love God supremely in view of it (1 John 4:9). Express it in faithful obedience to His every command (1 John 5:3). Another trait of God we are called upon to take notice of is found in Matthew 6:26. This trait is God's care and

provision. Take notice of the birds, the grass, and the flowers. God cares. You and yours are of more value than many such things. We are exhorted to take notice of other traits, such as those found in Romans 11:22. Here we are to behold the goodness and severity of God. God is good; He is upright in character, integrity, and holiness and rich in good deeds. He is also strict and stern, and He demands obedience and faithfulness and will not tolerate sin. While time, opportunity, and good fortune are yours, take notice of these things about the God of heaven.

7. Behold others worth following: In John 1:47, the Lord said to take notice of Nathanael. Jesus said that here was a man worthy to be given a look of investigation and imitation. Take notice of a man in whom was no guile. We need to behold others worthy of imitation. Jesus is our perfect example, but others are also worthy of imitation as they follow the Lord. Paul was such, and he himself held up Timothy in Philippians 2 as such a worthy example. Antipas in Revelation 2:13 is held up for others to follow. Hebrews 13:7 mentions following the faith of the strong elders and considering the end of their manner of life. Behold others worthy of being followed and imitate them and so live to be an example of the believers (1 Timothy 4:12).

8. Behold yourself: James 1:23,24 speaks of beholding one's self in a mirror. Galatians 6:1 speaks of considering one's self. Let us often take a sincere look within. Take notice of things that need to be added and evil that needs to be deleted. You know yourself better than anyone, except the Lord. Be honest with yourself and make the needed corrections as you look into the mirror of the soul, the Lord's holy word.

We have noticed the word "behold" as it relates to some things about our Lord Jesus Christ. The word means to look at

or take notice thereof. We would all do well to take a long look at everything possible to know and learn about our Lord. Friends, take notice of these things. **Behold the man Jesus!** Behold His mission, message, miracle, and mansions. We will be eternally blessed if our lives are lived in view of these realities.

A Contrast of Characters

People can be so different as it relates to their relationship and responsibilities before the Lord. A wide contrast is often seen even within families and communities. Two women, ever so different, are mentioned as being from the city of Thyatira. The Lord with eyes like a flame of fire saw them both (Revelation 2:18). One was Lydia and one was Jezebel. The account about Lydia is found in Acts 16 and Jezebel in Revelation 2. Read these accounts and see the portrait of one as righteous and the other as unrighteous. See the faithfulness of one and the unfaithfulness of the other. One has hope and the other does not. The difference in the life they lived surely spells the difference in the eternal destiny of their souls. Please notice the commendable traits of a Christian as found in Lydia and the unbecoming traits found in the life of Jezebel.

1. Lydia: Notice the wonderful traits of this lovely lady in Acts 16:13-15,40. I hope to see Lydia some day, don't you? We learn that Lydia was a business lady, but a person of faith and trust in the Lord. She seems to have been gathered with a group of ladies for prayer by the river side. Business did not dominate her life; she was a woman of proper priorities. We must also learn to put the Lord at the top. This woman worshiped God. She did not subscribe to the idolatry of her day. I hope you have a fond place in your heart for worshipping God in spirit and truth (John 4:23,24). Lydia was receptive to Paul's message from the Lord. She listened with an honest and sincere heart. The Lord closed each of the seven letters in Revelation 2,3 with a charge about listening. All who will not listen properly will be destroyed. The willingness of Lydia to listen resulted in obedi-

ence. She was baptized into Christ at the bidding of the Lord's message from Paul. Have you obeyed the gospel? You should notice next her desire to be faithful. Do you long to be dependable and loyal as stewards of the Lord? We must (Revelation 2:10). Finally, look at the hospitality of this New Testament Christian. Her house became a place for practical Christianity in action. Lydia serves as such a good example in so many ways to all of us. Learn from her.

2. Jezebel: The portrait of this lady in Revelation 2:20-23 is so different. She is so much like the Jezebel of old, wife of King Ahab. Please do not make the mistakes she made. She put herself in the position of a prophetess. It seems that she claimed a role not granted her of the Lord. Oh, how important it is to stay within the confines of the Law of God. Jezebel taught and led others to practice fornication. The greatest people are those who do right and teach others so (Matthew 5:19). The Lord must be furious toward those who do the opposite. This woman taught idolatry. Such people in 1 Corinthians 6:9,10 are told that heaven cannot be theirs. The Lord was patient with her but she would not repent. Jezebel will be judged like us all, according to our works. I hope she repented.

Two women are mentioned from Thyatira. They were as different as light and darkness. Which one are we the most like? Do you need to change? If so, I hope you will.

Basic Matters We Need to Know

Paul stated that it is the will of God for all to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). Life eternal is embedded in knowing the Father and the Son. Paul often stated that he did not desire that his readers be ignorant; an example is Romans 1:13. It is only through coming to know some things that we can have faith and yield obedience to the same. This has the power to make us free (John 8:32). In writing 1 Thessalonians 4, the Apostle Paul, writing for the Lord, charged these readers to come to a knowledge of some very basic matters that we all, even now, need to know. Notice three of these with me. These are the commands of the Lord, the Christ-like traits, and the certainties about death, the Lord's return, and beyond.

1. The commands of the Lord: Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:2 about knowing the commands of the Lord. God has made Christ to be our ruler and master. He has all authority in heaven and in earth (Matthew 28:18). We must submit ourselves under His authority and His rule. Before Him and to Him we will all one day give account (John 12:48). His commands are all recorded in His word (John 16:13). We can know them and through obedience to them we can be saved (2 Timothy 3:15-17). Wisdom demands that we be searching and seeking the pages of holy writ that we might know the commands the Lord has for us. We would do well to be like the Bereans of old and search the scriptures daily (Acts 17:11). Let us hunger and thirst to know the commands of the Lord (Matthew 5:6). Let us be just as anxious to put them to practice. Acts 10:33 is a good example also. Cornelius was eager to learn and obey. May we be also.

2. The Christ-like traits: In 1 Thessalonians 4:4 Paul

wrote about knowing how to practice the kind of life that Christ calls upon each to live. There is the purity and holiness that is to characterize each Christian. God has called us to be different, to live as the Lord lived. Paul will address subjects here like respect for the Father's will, brotherly love, self-controlled living, the dignity of work, and conduct that is without reproach.

3. The certainties about death, the Lord's return and beyond: In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Paul wants these Christians to know the truth on the matter of death and hereafter. We need to know this. We are so blessed because this passage is revealed and recorded. There is an anchor to the soul for those who take advantage of the vicarious suffering, death, and resurrection of the Lord. Living for the Lord brings blessings in life and in death. Death is not the end. Jesus is coming. There is to be a reunion of the righteous and an eternal abode with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words. Paul did not want these brethren ignorant; you do not have to be either.

May we ever seek to know more fully the commands given by the Lord, the kind of life we are to live, and the certainties that surround the Christian in life and death.

Things Left Within Our Trust

Paul often referred to Timothy as his son in the faith. Paul first visited Lystra, Timothy's home town, in Acts 14. Was it here that the young man responded to the gospel preached by Paul? He is truly one of the great men of the Bible. Read the compliment Paul gave to him in Philippians 2:19-24. Paul lays down many great charges to the young man Timothy. Among those is 1 Timothy 6:20, "*O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust.*" This is a valuable lesson until this day. The Lord gave a parable in Matthew 25:14-30 that again teaches accountability of the things entrusted to His servants. Hopefully, we realize that the Lord has entrusted us with some things. The Lord has gone on His journey; one day the day of reckoning will come. Will it be triumph or tragedy for us when that day comes? Read Matthew 25:21-26 and see the difference that was made in the way the servants used that which was entrusted to them. Notice with me some of the things left within our trust.

1. The Soul: The soul is yours to lose or save (Matthew 16:26). It is worth more than the whole world. Only you can save yours (Acts 2:40). It is left in your trust. You have an eternal spirit made in the image of God, and this spirit will live forever. You have been entrusted with this greatest of possessions. Where will your soul live in eternity? The Bible speaks of the saving of the soul (Hebrews 10:39), and saving the soul from death (James 5:20). Friend, keep on guard for your soul. Obey the Lord's will and be faithful; there is no other way to keep the soul.

2. Our Children: Children are an heritage from the Lord (Psalm 127:3). If you are a parent, think what has been entrust-

ed to you. You bear the responsibility and the accountability of bringing them up in the ways of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). All parents will one day be reckoned with by the Lord as to how they cared for this valuable possession placed within their trust.

3. The Gospel: The context of 1 Timothy 6:20,21 seems to point toward the fact that here Timothy was entrusted with the gospel. He was to live it faithfully and teach it faithfully. Paul spoke of having this treasure in earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7). We must live by it (Philippians 1:27), defend it (Philippians 1:17), and teach it to others (Mark 16:15). It is a sobering thought to be entrusted with the gospel.

4. Our Talents: The parable of the talents surely could represent our abilities, privileges, opportunities, monetary capabilities, etc. Think of all the things in this area committed to our trust. The parable of the talents teaches us that we are responsible for what we could be doing. We are called upon to do our best (1 Corinthians 15:58). Are you using your abilities and possessions for the Lord? We are stewards of them (1 Corinthians 4:2). Are we taking advantage of doors opened by the Lord (Revelation 3:8)?

Friends, guard that which is committed to your trust. Won't it be grand to hear the Lord say, "Well done"!

Some Forms of Freedom

Are you free? We all enjoy some forms of freedom. Our country will soon celebrate another anniversary of our freedom. This is a wonderful blessing and privilege and many do not enjoy this great benefit. There is a great freedom we can all enjoy that is greater than freedom from bondage to man or country. I have in mind the freedom in Christ. Christ offers freedom (Galatians 5:1). John spoke of the Lord's freedom to us as making us free indeed (John 8:36). Think how many people do not enjoy this freedom. They are free to come and go but still live under the dominion of sin. They serve sin and sin reigns over them. They yield their members as instruments of sin. Sin dominates their lives and has a grip on their heart and soul, and they live with guilt therefrom. They are defiled because of sin. They have been alienated from God because of sin and they face the consequences of sin here and eternal damnation is awaiting beyond this life. Romans 6:17,18 speaks of being made free from all of this. A person picks up a Bible and sees a promise, a price, and a plan for freedom. Notice these with me.

1. The promise for freedom: Some of the most beautiful and comforting of all verses in the Bible have to do with the promise for freedom from sin and its dominion. Think of the promise for sins to be made white as snow (Isaiah 1:18). There is the promise that sins will be cast behind the Lord's back (Isaiah 38:17). Micah spoke of the Lord casting sins into the depth of the sea. Jeremiah promised that the Lord would remember sins no more. This has to be appealing to all because all have sinned (Romans 3:23). This promise is greater than the Old Law which remembered sins each year (Hebrews 10:1). You can be free.

God is to be thanked for such freedom (Romans 6:17,18). Would you like to be free from the guilt and penalty of all the bad thoughts you have had, the evil words you have spoken, the evil deeds you have done, and the things you should have done that you left undone? Thank God for the promise of pardon and freedom.

2. The price for freedom: The price for freedom is never cheap. The price for this freedom was the blood of Jesus, for it is only through Jesus we are freed (Galatians 5:1). He redeems us through His blood (1 Peter 1:18,19), and we are made righteous by His righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). He gave Himself for us to purify us. Deliverance is through Jesus. This freedom is offered to all (John 3:16). Are you free?

3. The plan for freedom: Freedom is available to all (Titus 2:11,12), but most are still in bondage. There is a plan that must be followed. The Lord has laid down conditions to receive this wonderful blessing. You must listen to the Lord through His word (Acts 3:23), believe, repent (Luke 13:3), confess Christ before men (Romans 10:10), be baptized (Acts 2:38), and remain faithful (Revelation 2:10).

Do you know the joys of true freedom? **You can!** Have you gone back into bondage after being freed? You can come back. Obey the Lord today.

Responsibilities to the Lord

All people who live are accountable to God. We are creatures with responsibilities to our Creator. Some people have more responsibilities than others. Parents fall into this category. Listen to 1 Thessalonians 2:11: *“As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children.”* Think of the obligations of Christians and parents. There are responsibilities to the Lord, our brethren, our families, the lost, the poor, the hurting, our enemies and a host of other areas. From 1 Thessalonians 2:11 we see Paul’s care for young converts when he made the parallel to a father and his children. Think of the care that Jesus reminds us of in Matthew 18:1-14 of the little ones, whether it be young converts or young children. Paul had not long before converted these people at Thessalonica. We have an inspired record of how he treated these young Christians. He says, too, that this is the way fathers do with their children. Other texts would demand that mothers likewise should render the same care. Notice the three areas of concern from this passage.

1. Paul exhorted: The idea is found in this of calling to one’s side to encourage. Here is the time taken to make urgent appeals to others. We all need exhortation at times. We certainly all need to be pointing people by encouragement to the strait and narrow way (Matthew 7:13,14). Paul went on missions to exhort (Acts 20:2) and to challenge others to exhort (1 Thessalonians 5:11,14). The book of Hebrews is a challenge to exhort. Do it daily (Hebrews 3:13). It is at the heart of worship (Hebrews 10:24,25). *“Lift up the hands that hang and lift up the feeble knees”* were words of Hebrews 12:12. We have the love-

ly example of Barnabas in Acts. He was called the son of exhortation (Acts 4:36). Look how he exhorted Paul, the Christians at Antioch, and John Mark. As parents and Christians, let us never discourage, but exhort.

2. Paul comforted: Embedded herein is again that need for praise and encouragement. The Thessalonian congregation began under struggle and hardship. Think of the trials and troubles that people must often endure. We have a mission to comfort (2 Corinthians 1:4). Tychicus was sent to Ephesus and Colossae to comfort the hearts of these Christians (Ephesians 6:21). Other Christians and our children must often be encouraged to try again. We need tender affection for each other and our children. Do we have bowels of compassion? Do people know we care? Paul exhorted and comforted these brethren. Good parents do toward their children and caring Christians do likewise.

3. Paul charged: Herein is that urgent challenge to live for God. Paul earnestly besought these young converts to walk worthy of God who had given them the glorious privilege to be a part of His family (verse 12). Oh, how we need to challenge folks to live up to their name — Christian! Think how people need to be challenged to live for things eternal and people need to be charged to respect the authority of heaven. As parents, are we charging our children in these noble areas?

Things that Help Us to Know God

Simple but powerful words came from the Lord in Mark 11:22. That simple command was that man is to have faith in God. Hebrews 11:6 states that we are to believe that God is. Can you say along with Paul in Acts 27:25, "I believe God"? To fail to believe in God is to indict oneself as foolish (Psalms 14:1). It was a part of the Lord's prayer that believers would come to know God (John 17:3,4). The following ten things help me to know God. I hope they help you.

1. God's power: God is the Almighty (Genesis 17:1). He spoke the world into existence (Genesis 1) and He makes the sun to shine, the rain to fall, and the seasons to change. He is all powerful, all knowing, and eternal. We are as grasshoppers before Him (Isaiah 40:22).

2. God's presence: The Lord is in every place (Proverbs 15:3). We cannot flee from His presence (Psalm 139). God sees all we do and for such we are accountable (Romans 2:16). God has vowed to be with us and will never leave us (Hebrews 13:5,6). He is ever present (Psalms 46:1).

3. God's providence: Genesis 22 is a marvelous chapter on the God who provides. All good gifts come from above (James 1:17). Few people are actually conscious of their blessings from God. In a special way God provides for Christians. He promises to meet their needs, and hears their pleas.

4. God's people: Hebrews 4:9 refers to "God's people". They belong to the Lord, and God is their father. They make up the church. All are invited, but most refuse the invitation. These people have an inheritance awaiting (Romans 8:16-18).

5. God's protection: God's people are protected from temptation that is beyond their ability to withstand (1 Corinthians 10:13). God's people are protected from the second death if they are faithful. No one has to be lost.

6. God's precepts and plan: God has a law for His people and He has a plan for man. All people will give account to the Lord in judgement. We will be judged from the Word (John 12:48).

7. God's promises: There are exceeding great and precious promises from God (2 Peter 1:4). The Lord's promises are very sure (Psalm 93:5). He is faithful to His word (Joshua 23:14) and will keep His promises (Romans 4:20,21).

8. God's pardon: God is holy (2 Peter 1:14) and of purer eyes than to look on sin (Habakkuk 1:13). God gave His Son to pardon man from sin (John 3:16). He is ever merciful (Luke 6:36).

9. God's peace: There is a peace from God that passes all understanding and it is available to you. This peace keeps us from anxiety and fear and puts a song in one's heart (Acts 16:25).

10. God's place: God has a place reserved for the righteous called heaven. It is a place of mansions, free of sin, death, tears, pain and sorrows. Heaven is real. You can go there. Let these things motivate you to serve.

Proper Direction of Zeal

“Zeal” is defined as “an eagerness and ardent interest in pursuit of something”. Most people have zeal toward something. Many times the zeal of man is misdirected from the most important. It is good to be zealously affected in a good thing (Galatians 4:18), but many have zeal even toward evil things. Some overflow, abound, and even excel in wickedness (James 1:21).

Some people religiously have in zeal gone into “excited apostasy”. This too is not good. Zeal is demanded (Romans 12:11), but zeal must be according to knowledge (Romans 10:2). Paul at one time was very zealous for God, but so very wrong (Philippians 3:6). He went out on a mission to destroy the early church and thought he was justified in doing so. Acts 21:20 records that thousands of the Jews were zealous of the law. They were in error in this matter of diverting back to the Old Law. The group before whom Paul made his defense in Acts 22 was zealous toward God (Acts 22:3), but was in error. A word of caution comes to mind. We are called upon to be zealous but our zeal must be guided by the truth.

Where is your zeal directed? Is it geared toward spiritual things? Notice Colossians 3:1,2: *“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.”* Note the following areas in which our zeal should be directed.

1. Zeal toward God: Oh, how we need a greater fervor toward God! There should be an eagerness to obey His will. There should be a constant longing to be living holy lives after

the example of the Lord. Our every desire should be to please God. Let us rejoice in Him!

2. Zeal for the Bible: Jeremiah spoke of the Lord's word being in his heart as a fire in his bones (Jeremiah 20:9). We ought to crave it as a baby does milk (1 Peter 2:2). We ought to search it as a man would for silver and treasures (Proverbs 2:1-5). We ought to hunger and thirst for it (Matthew 5:6).

3. Zeal for souls: Do our greatest joys come when souls are won and remain faithful? John and Paul had no greater joy (3 John 4). Souls are worth more than the world.

4. Zeal for the church: Do we love the church? Do we seek it first (Matthew 6:33)? Are we serving therein and do we faithfully worship with the saints (Hebrews 10:25)? What type member of the body are you?

5. Zeal for heaven: Do you have a passion to go to heaven? Do you dream and anticipate this place? How much planning are you doing about heaven? Do you maintain readiness at all times?

6. Zeal for purity: Are you constantly refining and purging your character and heart? Only the pure can enter heaven (Matthew 5:8). We must look into the mirror of the word, see Jesus, and imitate Him (2 Corinthians 3:18).

7. Zeal for good works: We are to have zeal for doing good (Titus 2:14). Let us be rich in good works (1 Timothy 6:18). Let us do good with every opportunity that comes (Galatians 6:10).

We must be zealous in the right way!

What We Can Give to the Lord

Have you ever noticed how one person perceives a thing's worth as almost nothing and another values the same thing as maybe most important and of the highest worth? We would all agree that there is liberty for values of temporal and earthly things when comparing them one to the other. One likes a remote model plane and another likes hunting, etc. Yet there are spiritual things that must be of value to us all. These are the very things that should be of greatest value to us and yet sometimes they are counted by many as a waste.

Mary once was willing to anoint the Lord with an alabaster box of very precious ointment. She saw it as a good work and was willing to sacrifice that which may have come to her at great cost. Concerning the same event, Judas and other disciples saw it as a waste (Matthew 26). Many see it a waste to live for God. Do you ever question the worth of faithfulness? So many give of the following so unselfishly to their Lord and others count it a waste. In which group do we find ourselves?

1. The time given to the Lord: Think of the time men like Paul spent in prayer. It takes time to be the prayerful person that one should be (Philippians 4:6). Think of the time that must be given to Bible study. It takes of our time to know the Lord's word. There is much time involved in worship. There is time for getting ready and traveling to and from. It takes hours each week. There is time involved in giving ourselves to spiritual growth. Do I begrudge this time, or do I give it freely? We all know that time is a precious commodity and there are many demands on our time. Do we know the value of time given to the Lord?

2. The talents given to the Lord: Many very faithfully use their abilities in service to the Lord, while others see it as a waste. I see so many use their talents in doing various things in the Lord's work. Think of good folks like carpenters, doctors, counselors, and people from all walks of life who give of their talents to the Lord's cause. Is this a waste? Are you using your talents for the Lord?

3. The toils given to the Lord: All faithful Christians at times have to toil, labor, and endure to be what the Lord desires (Luke 13:24). There is the toil within our own lives against struggles. There are the trials that must be faced daily. Some see this and say it is vain to serve God (Malachi 3:14). Satan will make sure the Christian life is a struggle (Ephesians 6:10,11). Is the toil of Christianity worth it?

Friends, you must be ever assured that your labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58). God will not forget your work and labor of love (Hebrews 6:10). All you do for the Lord will be rewarded. Any sacrifice you make for Him will be worthwhile, both now and forever. See the reward after each beatitude (Matthew 5:3-12). There is no investment that pays as great a dividend as that given to the Lord (Matthew 6:19-21).

Are You Waiting, Watching, and Working for the Lord?

One of the great themes of the Old Testament was that Christ was to come. Christ did come, He established the church and paid the sacrifice for the sins of the world and left with the promise that He would come again (John 14:1-3). The day of the Lord will come (2 Peter 3:10). Some might ridicule and question the second coming of Christ. Many pay little concern to the return of Christ. Are you ready for His return? He is coming to judge the world (Matthew 25:31-33). He is coming to reckon with His servants (Matthew 25:19). As we often sing, it will be a great day, bright for some and sad for most. Do you eagerly await this day? You can so live as to look forward to this great day. This day stands as comfort to the persecuted, the bereaved, the tired, and the weary.

In the Olivet discourse of Matthew 24-25, Jesus spoke to His disciples about being ready for His return. Three things are rather obvious as you read the Lord's words in these chapters. Those were that they were to watch, wait, and work. The Lord said no man knows the day or hour of the Lord's return (Matthew 24:36). In verse 42 the Lord said "*Watch, for you know not the hour your Lord shall come.*" Matthew 25:1-13 is a picture of people patiently waiting for the Lord's return. Matthew 25:14-30 is a picture of people working in view of the Lord's return. These put together portray a good summary of the needed preparation to be ready for the return of Christ.

Paul wrote two letters to the church at Thessalonica. In these

letters all eight chapters make reference to the return of Christ. This undoubtedly emphasizes the importance of watching, waiting, and working. 1 Thessalonians 1:10 refers to their waiting for Christ from heaven. 1 Thessalonians 5:6 makes reference to their labor of love, their work of faith, and their service to God. The Lord will return. Is your life giving proper regards to these vital areas?

1. Waiting for the Lord: Since we do not know when the Lord will come, we must wait. Day by day we must patiently endure until He comes or until death comes to us. We must not grow weary. He promises to be with us while we wait.

2. Watching for the Lord: The Bible often warns us to be on guard. We must beware lest we allow Satan to gain control of our souls. We must be alert lest we drift away from faithfulness to our God. Are you waiting and watching?

3. Working for the Lord: To be ready for the Lord's return, we must work while we watch and wait. There are works of faith (Galatians 5:6). We must be ever obedient to the Lord. As we have opportunity, we must be given to doing good (Galatians 6:10). We are servants — let us work diligently and faithfully.

The Lord will return. **Are you ready? Are you waiting and working?**

Four Gifts from God

Let us pause daily to be aware of our wonderful blessings. Christians should be the most thankful of any people. They have more for which to be grateful than any other people. Paul would say, "*Blessed be God who hath blessed us*" (Ephesians 1:3). May we together notice four marvelous gifts from the bountiful hand of God. These are life, love, law, and land.

1. Life from God: God has given us life and breath and all things (Acts 17:25). In the Lord we live, move and have our being. Every good gift comes from the Lord (James 1:17). His sun and rain comes our way and He gives us fruitful seasons and has filled our hearts with food and gladness (Acts 14:17). Are we truly thankful for life? As Christians we have the promise of God for our needs to be met (Matthew 6:33), and that all will work together for our good in this life (Romans 8:28). Life from God is an opportunity to prepare for heaven. Thank God for life.

2. Love of God: God's love toward man is great (Ephesians 2:4). Such love is unknown in this world. We fall short in ability to fully grasp the love of the Lord (Ephesians 3:19). The adverb "so" is sometimes used to describe the depth of God's love toward man (John 3:16). Out of grace God gave His blood that man might live (Revelation 1:5). All I could ever do would never earn such a gift. I do not deserve it at all. I can never repay such a debt. Are you thankful for the love of God toward man? Do you realize man's plight without this gift? Many allow this love to be shown in vain (2 Corinthians 6:1). Be thankful for such love. Obey His commands today to receive the blessings of this great love. Thank God for His Son of His love.

3. Law of God: Where would the world be without the Bible? Your eyes have seen great things and things your ears have heard in no way compare to the glories of the gospel (1 Corinthians 2:9). It is light for our path (1 John 1:7). It is God's power to save and therein is revealed a plan for man's righteousness (Romans 1:16,17). Your life will be blessed here by living by its precepts (1 Peter 3:10,11). Your soul will be purified by obedience thereto and thus you will be ready for the judgement (John 12:48). Thank God for the Bible.

4. Land with God: Are we truly thankful for the hope of the soul? There is a land were truly we will never grow old. This is the promised land for the child of God (2 Timothy 4:6-8). This is the better country (Hebrews 11:16). No death, tears, sorrow, crying or pain will be there. The hope of heaven keeps us pressing forward. The longing to be with the Lord will one day be made reality. Thank God for the land that one day will be ours.

Let us all count our blessings. It will really surprise you what the Lord has done. Life and its blessings have come from God. Thank God daily.

The Hope of Heaven Motivates

The Lord wants all people to be saved and to one day live eternally in heaven (2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4). The Lord has made it possible for all to be saved in that He gave His Son to die for all (John 3:16). Eternal life as a gift is offered through Jesus (Romans 6:23). All who meet the Lord's requirements for salvation will live in heaven. Most people will not so live and will thus be lost (Matthew 7:13,14). Do you have hope of heaven? You can. You must hear to keep from being destroyed (Acts 3:23). You must believe or else die in sin (John 8:24). You must repent or perish (Luke 13:3), confess Christ or be denied (Matthew 10:32,33), and be baptized to be saved (Mark 16:16). You must then be faithful. If you, dear reader, have not done these things, then why do you wait? If you have done these and you are anticipating heaven, or if you fervently desire to go to heaven, then heaven serves as motivation for certain things in your life. Notice with me how the hope of heaven should motivate love, obedience, purity, and joy within us.

1. Hope of heaven motivates love: James 1:12 says that there is a crown of life awaiting those that love God. 1 Corinthians 16:22 says that those who do not love the Lord will be accursed. Grace is extended to those who love God with an undying love. A crown of righteousness awaits those that love the appearing of the Lord (2 Timothy 4:8). Do you love God above all else? If you have hope of heaven, then you stand in awe of God's love and love Him in return (1 John 4:19).

2. Hope of heaven motivates obedience: Those who do the will of the Father shall enter heaven (Matthew 7:21). Christ is the author of eternal salvation to the obedient (Hebrews 5:9).

In the concluding words of Holy Writ, John by inspiration says that the obedient to the commands of the Lord will have right to the tree of life and be privileged to enter heaven (Revelation 22:14). If heaven is offered only to the obedient and the Bible says those who fail to obey will be lost, then it behooves all of us who are motivated for heaven to be obedient.

3. Hope of heaven motivates purity: The Lord loved righteousness and hated iniquity and so must we (Hebrews 1:9). We must be like Jesus if we have hope of heaven (1 John 3:3). Matthew 5:8 says the pure in heart shall see God, and Hebrews 12:14 says that without holiness no man shall see the Lord. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and Galatians 5:19-21 plainly teach that the impure will be lost. Yes, hope of heaven motivates one to purity.

4. Hope of heaven motivates joy: In Luke 10:20 Jesus said to rejoice that your names are written in heaven. Matthew 5:10-12 says to rejoice and be exceedingly glad because of the great reward awaiting — heaven. Think of a place with no tears, pain, sorrow, death, or crying (Revelation 21:4). Think of a place incorruptible and undefiled. Think of those mansions. This gives joy in times of sorrow.

5. Hope of heaven motivates service: In Matthew 25:21-23 we are told that to get to heaven we must be a faithful servant. We are commanded to serve God and He requires that our bodies be presented as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1). Are you about the Father's business? The love of the Lord motivates us to not live to self, but to the One who died for us (2 Corinthians 5:14,15). Surely, heaven will have the same effect. Let us serve the Lord, serve the church, and do so with diligence. Those who have hope of heaven serve. They are the greatest of people.

6. Hope of heaven motivates peace: The hope of heaven serves as an anchor to the soul (Hebrews 6:18,19). Anything we are called upon to bear is light compared to the glory to be given us in heaven (Romans 8:18). We have peace in the time of trouble because of heaven (Matthew 5:10-12). There is comfort for us and others even in the hour of death when we have hope of heaven. Oh, the peace and comfort brought to reality because of the hope of heaven.

7. Hope of heaven motivates endurance: Jesus said the one that endures to the end will be saved (Matthew 10:22). He said that the one who looks back is not fit for the kingdom (Luke 9:62). Paul by inspiration wrote that the reaping is ours if we faint not. Jesus spoke of denial of self for us and a crucifixion that we must do daily (Luke 9:23). Hope of heaven motivates that enduring spirit.

8. Hope of heaven motivates faithfulness: The Lord in Revelation 2:10 said that faithfulness is required if we expect heaven in the end. An entrance shall be administered unto us into the everlasting kingdom if we are faithful (2 Peter 1:10,11). The faithful were given heaven in Matthew 25. Are you loyal, dependable and trustworthy before God? God is not unrighteous to forget your labors for Him.

To the Christian, heaven is held up as the hope of the soul and as the great reward (Matthew 5:10-12). Heaven has to be a motivating factor in the lives of all children of God. Do you want to go? The Lord has made it available through Jesus. God has given us the map to follow to get to that wonderful place (John 6:68). That place called heaven with its attractions such as rest, beauty, no more pain, death, tears, sorrows, crying, hunger, sin nor night, the reunion with God and all the righteous and many

more wonderful things serves to motivate us in certain areas. We have noticed how the hope of heaven should motivate us to love, obedience, purity and joy.

Do you have hope of heaven? If not, why not obey the gospel? Why do you wait? Have you strayed away? You are lost in the erring state (James 5:19,20). Come home today. Heaven is the real essence of life. Live for Jesus — make heaven your home. You will be so glad you did. If not, you will have an eternity of regrets.

Beholding a Few Things about the Lord

He who came down from above is above all (John 3:31). Never a man spake like Him (John 7:46). He has all authority in heaven and in earth (Matthew 28:18). He is Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). Our Lord is the King of kings (1 Timothy 6:15). Christ has all preeminence (Colossians 1:18). We should submit to Him in this life (Philippians 2:9-11). Every knee shall bow before Him in judgement (Romans 14:11,12). We would do well to take notice of the Christ! John saw Jesus coming and said, *“Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world”* (John 1:29). Let us behold a few things about Him.

1. Behold the Lord’s purity: He did no sin (1 Peter 2:22). Was He tempted? Oh yes, He was tempted in all points even as we but yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). In Him was no sin. Truly, He was without spot and blame. No one could convict Him of sin (John 8:46). Our Lord never thought evil, never spoke evil, never did evil, never left undone what should have been done, and never broke the guidance of His conscience. Our Lord was perfect in the sense of sinless. Thus He is then the perfect example for us to follow (1 Peter 2:21). Our minds are to be like His and we are to be conformed to His image (Romans 8:29). Truly, He is to be formed within us. Let us look into the mirror of God’s word to the example of Christ and grow more and more like Him (2 Corinthians 3:18).

2. Behold the Lord’s price: Oh, what a high price the Lord paid for the redemption of our souls! He lived above sin;

this made Him the only suitable sacrifice for sin. Our Lord was willing to give Himself and shed His very blood for us. Think of that precious blood of Christ. Look at the face of our Lord stained with sweat, spit, tears, and blood. This was the price for my sins and yours. He gave all (Titus 2:14) that we might be redeemed from sin (Ephesians 1:7). That blood is my only hope (Colossians 1:27). 1 Corinthians 8 and Romans 14 speak of one being destroyed and another one perishing even though this price had been paid for them. We have a vital part in our own salvation. Have you met the conditions? Are you washed from your sins in that blood? No one else can do it for you. You must bear this burden (Galatians 6:5). God will not do it for you. In this sense, you must save yourself. You must hear or be destroyed (Acts 3:23), believe or be condemned (Mark 16:16), repent or perish (Luke 13:3), confess or be denied (Matthew 10:32,33), and be baptized to be saved (Acts 2:38). In order to benefit from the blood of Christ it is necessary for us to remain faithful. Paul mentioned more than once the possibility of this price being paid in vain (Galatians 2:21). Friend, do not let this be your case. Jesus loved you and died for you (Galatians 2:20). May that price capture us all to life for Him (2 Corinthians 5:14,15).

3. Behold the Lord's promises: *"For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us"* (2 Corinthians 1:20). They are exceedingly great and precious (2 Peter 1:4). He is not indifferent toward His promises. The testimonies of the Lord are very sure (Psalm 93:5). Think of all His promises that relate to our salvation and eternal destiny. Think of His promises to return and judge the world. He has promised to never leave us nor forsake us and to work all things together for our good. There is the promise to provide all our needs. He is able and faithful to keep each promise, and not one

thing will fail of all He has promised to do. Take notice of the Lord's precious promises.

4. Behold the Lord's pardon: *"Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?"* (Micah 7:18). Our God will abundantly pardon (Isaiah 55:7). The Lamb of God was the sacrifice that made such possible. Such grace is found in Him (2 Timothy 2:1). Through Christ, sins can be made white as snow, sins are cast behind the Lord's back, sins are cast into the depth of the sea, sins are removed from us as far as the east is from the west, sins are washed away in the Lord's blood and we are made righteous in Christ. Even after conversion, we are offered grace when we stumble, if we will confess and repent of the same (1 John 1:9). The Lord's pardon is my only hope from the penalty of sin. Take notice and take advantage before it is too late.

5. Behold the Lord's precept: While here on earth man must come to grips with the Lord's word. He will either learn to respect in this life, or learn of it when it's too late beyond this life. The words of the Lord will be the standard by which judgment will be rendered (John 12:48). His words are powerful, able to convict and save us from sin (Romans 1:16). If you love the Lord, you will obey His commands (John 14:15). Obedience thereto will bring you the life of an hundredfold while here (Mark 10:29,30) and look what it will bring beyond this life!

6. Behold the Lord's place: While we live below, let us ever take notice of heaven. Jesus has prepared a place where no sin, sorrow, pain, death, or tears ever invade. It's a prepared place for a people who prepare by purity and obedience and faithfulness. That place can be your eternal abode if you obey and live the rest of your time here for Him who died for you.

The Plight of Man

From the following passage let us glean four very important basic lessons: *“From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou has the words of eternal life”* (John 6:66-68). Our study will center upon the plight of man without God, the provision for man from God, the plan to man of God, and the place for man with God.

1. The plight of man without God: Peter recognized a great truth — man separated from the Lord is in an utterly helpless situation. He is without hope (Ephesians 2:12). He can do nothing. He is an enemy of God, dead in sin, filthy and unclean, and cannot save himself. In this condition, if he or she dies, they die in sin with no hope of going where the Lord is (John 8:21-24). Peter knew that there was nowhere else to turn. Yet, many still will not come to the Lord that they might have life (John 5:40) and many turn back to the world after having come (James 5:19,20). Friend, do not allow anything to turn you from following the Lord. Do you recognize the wretched condition of one who walks away from Jesus?

2. The provision for man from God: Peter also recognized that the Lord provided for the deepest needs of man. The Lord relieved the pitiful condition of man. In Romans 5:1,2 Paul wrote of justification by faith and spoke of such being possible through the Lord and by Him. He came to bring salvation to sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). All else are broken cisterns (Jeremiah 2:13). He is the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). Grace is in Him (Titus 3:5-7). His becoming poor offers us riches (2 Corinthians

8:9). Poor, lost, sinful man can turn only to the Lord. He is the bread of life, the light of the world, the door, the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the way, the truth, and the true vine. What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

3. The plan to man of God: Peter referred to the words of the Lord. His words have power to save, they are eternal, and they will judge us at the last day (John 12:48). These words form a plan for man. There are therein facts to be believed, commands to be kept, and promises to be cherished. The Lord loves all and died for all, but only those who adhere to this plan will live eternally with Him (Hebrews 5:8,9). There is immediate cleansing for you when you complete the steps of obeying the gospel (Romans 6:17,18). You can be made free from sin, have peace with God, and be filled with hope of the glory of God (Romans 5:1,2).

4. The place for man with the Lord: There is a place described as one of eternal life. Peter knew this was offered through Christ. There are good days here (1 Peter 3:10,11) but this in no way compares to heaven. Think of the rest, rewards, peace, joy, righteousness, reunion, and being in the presence of the Lord. Think how different heaven will be with no pain, no tears, no death, no crying, no sorrow, no night, no temptation, or sin. Heaven can be yours. Your soul is worth more than the entire world (Matthew 16:26).

Satan's Many Lies

In John 8:44 Jesus made reference to the fact of Satan being a liar. He is truly the father of lies. Think back through history and watch Satan lie to people and cause them to lie while on the earth. In Acts 5:1-12, Satan filled the heart of Ananias to lie to God. Go all the way back to the garden of Eden and there see the devil in subtlety beguile Eve. In Genesis 3:1-6 Satan persuaded Eve to believe that she would not die if she partook of the forbidden fruit. In Genesis 2:16,17 God had plainly said death would come. Then in Genesis 3:4 Satan said it would not come. Who spoke the truth?

The Bible says all liars will be in hell (Revelation 21:8). Satan will be there. We will be there if we follow his character in becoming untruthful, or if we believe his lies and live contrary to the word of God. No one likes liars, and lies are some of Satan's greatest tools, even his fiery darts. Notice with me a few of Satan's lies. He uses many more and we should resist the devil's lies.

1. The lie of waiting for a more convenient time: Think how the devil successfully uses this lie. To think that we can put off until later what should be done now is to believe a lie. James 4:17 says to fail to do what one knows should be done is to sin. Felix fell for this lie and so did Agrippa, and many still fall for it. Many have postponed their obedience to the gospel. The devil has persuaded them to wait until later when things will be easier and better. Many know they need to be restored to their love for the Lord but they wait. The devil persuades one to believe it is all right to wait. The Bible speaks of today being the time to act and possibly now being the only time we have (2 Corinthians

6:2). We see Jesus speaking of a time when man cannot work (John 9:4) and talking of not waiting but responding promptly in search for souls (John 9:45). As we have sung so often, there is danger and death in delay. Death could come at any time. The rich young farmer met death in an unprepared state (Luke 12:15-21). The Lord could return at any moment. The five foolish virgins were found unprepared (Matthew 25:1-13). Our hearts can be hardened (Hebrews 3:13). The ones we want to reach can be hardened. We are believing and following a lie of Satan when we put off doing things toward God that call for action now.

2. The lie that the Christian life is dull and without joy: Satan has sold the idea that the Christian life is a great burden to be borne. He says it is without happiness and satisfaction. No greater falsehood could be put forth before the world. The Christian has a life of a hundred-fold in this world, coupled with hope as an anchor of the soul for a life in heaven. Luke 18:30 speaks of the manifold more life in this present time. Peter speaks of the Christian life as that of a good life. It is the life of real joy and peace, and one of assurance and contentment. It is the abundant life because of blessings here that are unique to Christians and the hope of heaven.

3. The lie that indifference is pleasing to God: Satan persuades people to believe that they can be careless, haphazard, and lukewarm in their responsibilities before God. It is easy to give less than our best. It is easy when we can allow other things to be put ahead of our Christian service. Satan makes people believe they can hold to God with one hand and hold to the world with the other. The Lord says indifference is not pleasing (Revelations 3:14-19). He says to seek first the Kingdom and His righteousness and to love God with **all the heart**. The Bible

teaches one to **abound** in the Lord's work and to love the Lord **above anyone**, and to present the body as a **living sacrifice** to God (Romans 12:1). Don't follow Satan's lie, but be a faithful, loyal servant of God.

4. The lie that God is a God of goodness and not strictness: We fall for Satan's lies often because they make a play on partial truths. We must believe and appreciate the Lord as a God of love. He is good. But to believe that God looks the other way when we sin, has no law, and does not hold us accountable is to believe a lie. Romans 11:22 challenges us to see God as a God of goodness, but also strictness. The Bible is a message of love and grace, but also a book of conditions to be met if we are to be blessed eternally in heaven. God is just, and please don't allow Satan to deceive you otherwise.

5. The lie that youth is a time for living for pleasure and self: Think how many young people are falling victim to this lie of Satan. He tempts youth to live in riotous living while young. He says all need to sow a few wild oats. He says to follow the crowd — everyone else is doing so. The truth is youth is a time to be given to God. What if death should come while you are still young? Let us not be led astray by this lie.

The State of the Lost

In Philippians 3:18-21 Paul makes reference to the two classes of people: the lost and the saved. Often in his writings the beloved apostle contrasted the difference in life and destiny of the two groups. Let us notice the lost in this article.

As Paul wrote about the lost his heart was broken. He often wept as did our Lord over the lost. One is reminded of the Lord's words in Matthew 5:4 that speaks of those who mourn being comforted. Do we grieve over sin in our own lives, and in the lives of others? Many live in sin and die lost because of deception, thinking they are right with God. Many live in sin, realizing all along that they are lost. Notice the traits of the lost referred to in Philippians 3. Granted, some lost people might not have all those traits, but we do not have to do all the evil of the world in order to be lost. No one has to be lost. God desires that all be saved and has made provisions for all. Let us be diligent students of the Bible so that we will not be deceived and let us have faithful obedient hearts to the Lord's commands.

1. The lost are enemies of the cross of Christ: Think of the false teachers of Philippians 3:2. They said righteousness came by the law and as such Christ died in vain. We can be enemies of the cross when we fail to teach and live in view of the necessity of the cross. Those who are trying to be saved by good morals only, and feel no need of the cross, are its enemies. Those who become unfaithful are its enemies. Are you an enemy of the cross of Christ?

2. The lost face destruction at the end: Proverbs 14:12 speaks of the end of the way of error being death. Jeremiah 5:31

paints a gloomy picture for the end of the wicked. Revelation 22:15 speaks of being without, or on the outside, of heaven. The fate or final lot of all the lost is destruction. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 speaks of being destroyed from the presence of the Lord. This is not extinction, but loss of well-being forever.

3. The lost have their belly as their God: Think of the host of people who will be lost because they did not practice self-control in the area of fleshly desires. Galatians 5:19-21 speaks of the lusts of the flesh and says those who do such cannot enter heaven. Think of all the fornication, adultery, pornography and such defines a world living for the flesh. The pleasures of sin are only for a season (Hebrews 11:25). Let us not trade a season for eternity.

4. The lost glory in their shame: Our glory should be in the cross. Our lives should be given to bringing glory to God (Philippians 4:20), and not ourselves (1 Corinthians 3:6-9). The heart is hardened when we glory in the muck and mire of sin.

5. The lost mind earthly things: Think of so many in our world who are not as some but still mind earthly things most in life. They have few or no thoughts of the spiritual and heavenly. Let us not trust things. Live for eternity **now**. Let us not be as the lost.

What Prejudice Does

Prejudice is a preconceived judgment or an unwarranted opinion. It produces an irrational attitude of hostility directed against an individual, a group, a race, or their supposed characteristics. Prejudice is actually a symptom of an even deeper problem — evil thoughts and impure hearts. It is a sin to have prejudice toward our fellow man, whether it be race, class, or any other form.

Prejudice in the local congregation produces “cliques”. Romans 15:1-7 teaches that strong congregations do not have cliques within. God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:11). In this, man is often much unlike God. God loves all alike. Yet, we often see party spirit and ill will between blacks and whites just because of preconceived judgments and unwarranted opinions. It works in both directions. Sometimes prejudice is seen between the rich and poor, the education and uneducated, city folks and the country folks, males and females, northerners and southerners, and often between certain families and their descendants within the community.

Are we more friendly to one group of people than another? Do we group and categorize people at first notice? To whom do we wield the most attention? The “unacceptable” classes often find no welcome in our congregations. As such, the Lord is not welcome either. It is no wonder that growth within the church is down in some areas. The problem could be that certain classes do not feel welcome and we know that not many high, mighty, and wise will be called (1 Corinthians 1:26) because so many of this class feel no need of the gospel. It is so sad to see people alienated one from another because of preconceived judgments

and unwarranted opinions. God loves all (John 3:16). Jesus tasted death for all (Hebrews 2:9). God made of one blood all nations (Acts 17:26). Mankind is rather well-leveled by sin, by his need of Christ and the cross, by death, by judgment, and by eternity.

Prejudice strikes at the very heart of some basic principles of the Bible. Notice four of these with me.

1. Prejudice attacks the principle of universalism of the gospel. The gospel is needed by all (Romans 3:23). We are commanded to carry it to all (Mark 16:15). But prejudice causes certain people and certain classes to be shunned.

2. Prejudice strikes at the impartiality that we are to have toward all. God is no respecter of persons. We too are charged to conduct ourselves without respect of persons (James 2:9). Prejudice causes certain people to neglect certain others, along with their needs.

3. Prejudice attacks the unity that the Lord desires of His people. The Lord wants us to be one (John 17:20,21). Prejudice has to cause division and division is sinful (1 Corinthians 1:10; Galatians 5:19-21). Congregations with prejudice have “cliques”.

4. Prejudice undermines the love we are to have toward all. Prejudice reveals a lack of love. We cannot love God and be unkind, unfair and unloving toward others. Let’s be like Nathanael in John 1:45-47. Let’s be one.

The Christian's Walk

There are so many verses in the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, that refer to the life of God's child as a walk. One does not journey too far in the scriptures until he reads of Enoch and his walk as a child of God (Geneses 5:22,24). A little later one comes in contact with Noah who is referred to as one who walked with God (Genesis 6:9). Walk is indicative of activity. It involves a course that one pursues. The walk on earth of a child of the Lord can be divided into at least four areas. There is the walk before the Lord, the walk after the Lord, the walk in the Lord, and the walk with the Lord. Let us notice these together.

1. Walk before the Lord: God said to Abram in Genesis 17:1 to walk before Him. We all walk in the presence of the Lord. We are ever subject to His inspection and open to the knowledge of God. We ever live and move always in His divine presence. The eyes of the Lord are in every place beholding the good and the bad (Proverbs 15:3). Our sins are not hidden from the Lord (Psalms 69:5). We can never flee from the presence of the Lord (Psalm 139:1-8). All things are naked and open before Him (Hebrews 4:13). He knows our works. There should ever be an awareness of this truth. There should be an emphasis to proper conduct before the Lord. Our all is ever before the Lord.

2. Walk after the Lord: You should walk after the Lord, fear Him, keep His commandments, obey His voice, and you should serve Him, and cleave unto Him (Deuteronomy 13:4). We are to follow the pattern He has given. The Lord is to be our model and guide (1 John 2:6). We are to live godly and follow Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). His example is our guide (1 Peter 2:21). He is to be formed in us (Galatians 4:19).

3. Walk in the Lord: Paul said in Colossians 2:6 to walk in the Lord. Christians have been baptized into the sphere in which they live (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3). In the Lord, there is access to all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3). Are you in the Lord, or are you outside of Him? Salvation, peace, redemption, joy, sanctification and reconciliation are among the things found in this walk in the Lord.

4. Walk with the Lord: Micah pled for people to walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8). This walk is with God as our companion and friend. To walk with God we must be in agreement with Him. We must be going in the same direction (Amos 3:3). Let us walk with the Lord blameless and ever obedient to His commands (Luke 1:6). We must walk in reverence of the Lord (Acts 9:31). A walk is maintained by the standard, the Bible (1 John 1:7). Our walk is by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7). We must be careful about how we walk before others (1 Thessalonians 4:12). This walk is one filled with good works (Ephesians 2:10). Our walk with the Lord here will lead us to the privilege of walking with Him in Heaven (Revelation 3:4).

All people walk before the Lord, but not all the people walk after the Lord. Not all walk in the Lord and not all walk with Him here or in the world to come. The choice is yours.

Take Time

We all live in a “hurry-up” society. A rush is made in one direction and then the other. Stress, depression, anxiety, high blood pressure, and lots of other not-so-good commodities are often the result. But a much worse result could be a reality; we might be failing to a great degree or failing altogether to do some things that simply must be done. There are some things for which we truly must take time or make time. Please notice with me a few of the many things we must be about doing. I hope you are not neglecting these precious things that must be given some of our precious time and energies.

1. Take time to be holy. We often sing about taking time for holiness. One must be pure in heart if he wants to see God (Matthew 5:8). Hebrews 12:14 states that without holiness, no one will see the Lord. Time and energy must be given to meditation and the practice of godliness in life. Step back and take time to conduct yourself in a Christ-like fashion. This is the will of God (1 Thessalonians 4:3). It takes many hours, days, weeks, months, and years to develop into the person we should be. Take time to be holy.

2. Take time to pray. We are simply too busy if we fail to take time to pray. “*Pray without ceasing*” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). “*Men always ought to pray and not lose heart*” (Luke 18:1). “*Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Ephesians 5:20). Prayer has a part in our faithfulness, in our forgiveness, in our concern for others, in our being grateful and in honoring God. Are you trying to live without prayer? Do you realize the great benefits prayer can bring to your life? Take time for prayer.

3. Take time for study. Lack of knowledge can bring destruction (Hosea 4:6). One cannot obey what he does not know. We ought to hunger and thirst for a greater knowledge of the word of God (1 Peter 2:2). Give attendance to reading (1 Timothy 4:13). There is no substitute for study of the Bible. You will unearth nuggets of golden truth that will enrich and make life sweeter day by day. In a busy world, please do not neglect study.

4. Take time for worship. Many fill their schedules with so many less important things and no time is taken for worship. We are commanded to make time for worship (Hebrews 10:25). One will long for worship when his heart is right (Psalm 122:1). God is to be worshiped (John 4:23,24). Set your schedule so the opportunities granted for worship can be grasped. Take time for worship and find the joy of true worship to the Lord.

5. Take time to do good. In such a busy world, it is so easy to become selfish and self-centered. Let us continue to take time to serve each other (Galatians 5:13). Let us be rich in good works (1 Timothy 6:18) and ever zealous of doing good (Titus 2:14). May we never grow tired of well doing (Galatians 6:9). Part of our mission is to be of good works (Ephesians 2:10). Jesus, our example, went about doing good. In a world of unending demands, let us all take time to do good.

Friends, you are busy, yes. Let the priority of our urgency be cast toward holiness, prayer, study, worship, and doing good.

The Lord Is at Hand

To the Philippians, Paul made reference to the Lord being at hand (Philippians 4:5). There is certainly a peace and great comfort in knowing that such is a reality. Think of the assurance of having help nearby. This is a promise from Him who is faithful (Hebrews 10:23). No wonder Peter described the promises of God as precious (2 Peter 1:4). Notice with me some of these monumental occasions when the Lord is at hand and we are so very thankful for it.

1. When we turn away from sin: The Bible speaks of the prodigal son coming to himself, repenting of sin, and coming home to his father. The Lord is the Father, He is ever at hand (Luke 15:17). There is rejoicing in heaven when a sinner repents (Luke 15:7,10). The Lord delights in mercy and is ever ready to pardon (Micah 7:18). If we confess our faults, He is faithful and just to forgive (1 John 1:9). Our Lord is at hand when we turn from sin.

2. When we face the hour of temptation: We will be tempted to sin even as was our Lord (Hebrews 4:15). Think of the temptations our Lord faced in Matthew 4. The devil is sure to seek to devour us through his wiles and fiery darts involving temptation (Ephesians 6:10,11; 1 Peter 5:8). When we are tempted, the Lord will be at hand. He promises to make a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13). Thank God the Lord is not far from us.

3. When we go to Him in prayer: His ears are ever open to hear our prayers (1 Peter 3:12). God heard the prayers of Hezekiah (Isaiah 38:5) and Daniel (Daniel 6) and He will hear

your prayers. He is a father who cares (Matthew 7:7-11). At any hour of any day, a faithful child of God can know that the God of heaven is listening to his prayer and will answer the same (1 John 5:14-16; 3:22). The Lord is at hand.

4. When we are sick, lonely, or in tears: The Lord was at hand during the sickness of Epaphroditus (Philippians 2) and the loneliness of Paul (2 Timothy 4:16,17). God saw the tears of Hezekiah (Isaiah 38) and the sorrows of Hagar (Genesis 16). The Lord is at hand when you have days of sickness, loneliness, and sorrow. He has promised to never leave nor forsake (Hebrews 13:5,6).

5. When we face death: David referred to the Lord being with him when he walked through the valley of the shadow of death (Psalm 23:4). This surely gave early Christians the courage needed to face death because the Lord was at hand. They were not to fear what man could do (Matthew 10:28). God cares; He is ever at hand.

6. When we obey or disobey: The eyes of the Lord are in every place (Proverbs 15:3). All things are naked and open before Him (Hebrews 4:13). He truly knows our works (Revelation 2 and 3). He knows our thoughts and He takes account of our deeds (Romans 2:6). The Lord is ever at hand to give credit and reward for the good, but His justice will not ignore the evil.

Yes, the good Lord is at hand. Draw near to Him and He will draw near to you. One day, we can even be with Him eternally (John 17:24).

Desirable and Undesirable Traits

We all remember our school days of years gone by. Think of all the lists over which we were tested in those combined years. These ranged from traits of certain governments to crops grown in certain countries to functions of certain body parts and a thousand lists in between. We think of more important lists, like the list of survivors from a plane crash or train wreck. Lists are important. Maybe we keep a list of things to do or carry a list of items to purchase at the store. We all deal with lists. Have you noticed all the lists in the Bible? People interested in pleasing God in heaven are interested in these lists. Take a look at some of these.

1. Lists of traits to be added: There is the list of beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-12. Blessings are pronounced on those poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted but yet endure. A list is given in 2 Peter 1:5-7 of things to be added. Notice that virtue is to be added to faith, knowledge to virtue, temperance to knowledge, patience to temperance, godliness to patience, brotherly kindness to godliness, and charity to brotherly kindness. Galatians 5:22,23 lists the fruits of the Spirit. They are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. Colossians 3:12-14 lists some good traits to imitate God and with which to cloth ourselves. These are mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance, forgiveness and charity. Ephesians 4 lists traits of the new man that are to be put on. James 3:17,18 lists traits of the wisdom that is from above. 1 Timothy 6:11 lists six things that all Christians must

follow after. Then, think of the lists of qualifications of elders and deacons and their wives in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. These lists must become great goals of ours.

2. Lists of traits to be avoided: Paul by inspiration gives a list of the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21. Such a list is to be avoided. They are adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulation, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envying, murders, drunkenness, reveling, and such like. A similar list is given in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 where Paul says of such that they cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Another such similar group is found in Revelation 21:8, where traits are given of those who will be lost forever. Colossians 3:5-9 gives a list of traits to be put off and avoided. These are lists of warning.

3. A list of a few names to be attained: Few compared to many will be saved eternally (Matthew 7:13,14). In Philippians 4:3 Paul mentioned names in the book of life. In Luke 10:20 the Lord spoke of names written in heaven. Hebrews 12:23 speaks of those written in heaven. Revelation 10:12,15 speaks of that list. Whosoever is not found written in that book will be lost forever. Think of the importance of this list.

Lists — yes, we live with them daily. God knows best. Let us add, avoid, and attain.

Lessons to Learn

The Bible calls for us to be an ever learning people (2 Corinthians 4:16). This book often relates to us of those things we should learn. It is so sad to see a world ever learning, but not learning the things the Lord would like most for it to learn. Paul made reference to such folk (2 Timothy 3:7). Christianity is a taught religion, and Christians are always to be a learning people. We should be learning the things that are of the very greatest in value. True wisdom is ours when we learn the things God would have us learn. We should learn from our experiences in this present world, learn more and more knowledge of the Bible, and learn contentment. What are you learning as you live? In what are you putting the most efforts to learn? Let us notice some wonderful lessons that must be learned.

1. Let us learn from experience: It was Laban who said, *“Please stay, if I have found favor in your eyes, for I have learned by experience that the Lord has blessed me for your sake”* (Genesis 30:27). Paul in Romans 5:3 wrote of the experience of tribulation producing patience. Paul in Philippians 1:12 spoke of the things that had happened unto him. Friend, you will be blessed immensely here and hereafter if you will learn from experience. David in Psalm 119:71 said it was good for him to have been afflicted because he had learned the Lord's statutes. Let us learn as we grow older. The inward man ought to be renewed each day. God expects us to learn from experience. He suffers long with us, but will not suffer long forever (Matthew 25). Let us learn from our mistakes and do better; diligence demands such. May we learn that God is faithful. May we learn to better see our frailties and the uncertainties of this life. Let us

learn that things are temporal. Let us learn to think more eternally and long for heaven more. Are you learning from your experience?

2. Let us learn more and more knowledge of the Bible: David spoke of learning the Lord's righteous judgment, His statutes, and His commandments (Psalm 119:7,71,73). The things written aforetime were written for our learning (Romans 15:4). Jesus often made reference to learning the revealed will of the Father (Matthew 9:13). Jesus told His disciples to learn the parable of the fig tree (Matthew 24:32). Paul wrote of the doctrine the Romans had learned (Romans 16:17), and spoke of the truth the saints at Colossae had learned of Epaphras (Colossians 1:7). We could never forget Paul's reference to those lessons of scripture that Timothy had learned (2 Timothy 3:14-17). Are you seeking to learn more and more about the Lord's will for mankind? We err, not knowing (Matthew 22:29). We can be destroyed for lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6). We cannot enter heaven without obedience and we can't obey without knowledge. This calls for study. Are you making efforts to learn?

3. Let us learn contentment: In Philippians 4:11, Paul spoke of his learning to be content. We all must learn to be content because a direct command is found in Hebrews 13:5 which is a plainly put as "*be baptized*" is in Acts 2:38. Godliness is profitable unto all things (1 Timothy 4:8) and godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Timothy 6:6). So many have not learned so to be. As Christians, there is a sufficiency of needs met (2 Corinthians 9:8; Matthew 6:33). Learning on such wonderful promises brings contentment. There is a sobering peace and joy found in true contentment. It is fine for us to have more than bare necessities, for with such we can be rich in good works (1

Timothy 6:17,18). But it is a sin to not learn contentment and live contented in this life.

4. Let us learn Christ and God. Jesus said to come unto Him and learn of Him (Matthew 11:29). Paul told the Ephesians of some things not learned from Christ but embedded in the message is that they needed to learn Christ (Ephesians 4:20). Jesus spoke of hearing and learning of the Father (John 6:45). In a prayer, Christ said life eternal had roots in knowing God and the Son (John 17:3). We must learn Christ and allow Him to live in us (Galatians 2:20). Such has bearing upon the very hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). We wear the name of Christ (Acts 11:26), we must follow in His steps (1 Peter 2:21), His walk (1 John 2:6), His mind (Philippians 2:5), His image (Romans 8:29). There is a god-likeness that we must develop (Titus 2:11,12). This should prompt us all to continue in the Lord's word (John 8:31) and truly be learners of God and Christ. Such will develop within us love and respect for God. This will in turn mold our lives into the kind of people we should be.

5. Let us learn obedience: Our perfect example, Jesus Christ, was divine, but also man (John 1:1,14). The man Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 2:5) learned from His sufferings the duty and necessity of obedience (Hebrews 5:8). His will was to do the Father's will (John 6:38; Matthew 26:39-42). His meat was to do such (John 4:34). His coming to earth was to obey His Father's desires (John 6:38). He always did the things that pleased God (John 8:29) and finished what He was sent to do (John 17:4; 19:30). We must learn obedience so that we can be the beneficiaries of the grace of God (Matthew 7:21) and will have the right to heaven (Revelation 22:14). May we all learn to obey God (Acts 5:29). We will gain a jewel when we learn obedience.

6. Let us learn to do good: Titus 3:14 is a challenge and a command for us all to learn to maintain good works. Isaiah 1:17 said learn to do well. 1 Timothy 5:4 challenges us to learn to care for our families. We have been blessed well and likewise charged to be rich in good works (1 Timothy 6:18). The Bible equips us to do the good that we should do (2 Timothy 3:16,17). Jesus went about doing good (Acts 10:38) and so must we. Let us learn to take advantage of every such opportunity (Galatians 6:10). Are you willed with zeal for doing good (Titus 2:14)? Learn to do good and not evil.

We will be wiser in heart and life when we learn more and more about God, Christ, obedience, and doing good.

